



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 9 MAR 2022

	International	National	Regional and Local
Events, Opportunities Go to articles	03/09 Day 14 of the Russia invasion 03/09 Ukraine race to save cultural heritage 03/09 Russians fleeing Russia amid crackdown 03/09 Kyiv air raid sirens; Russia pressures cities 03/09 China flexes in South China Sea 03/09 WHO: cases, deaths continue drop 03/09 Austria suspends vaccine mandate 03/09 Hong Kong's pandemic goes critical 03/09 Hong Kong Covid crackdown stirs panic 03/09 Food crisis: prices rise, export bans 03/09 Australia PM seeks emergency declaration 03/09 Ukraine battlefield successes emerge 03/08 US: no unusual nuclear activity Russia 03/08 European 'double-standard' on refugees? 03/08 US officials: Putin 'unlikely to be deterred' 03/08 Russia shells Mariupol evacuation routes 03/08 Ukraine leader defiant, vows no surrender 03/08 Russia forces tighten grip on Kyiv gateway 03/08 Ukraine hospitals confront grim reality war 03/08 Russia military solving logistical problems 03/08 NATO mobilizes: resupply Ukraine fighters 03/08 Stocks fall again, energy prices climb 03/08 Oil boosts Russia war chest \$285M/day 03/08 EU seeks independence from Russia oil 03/08 Russia bars buying of dollars by citizens 03/08 Food companies pause Russia operations 03/08 Hundreds of ships trapped by Ukraine war 03/08 Report: Russia has most sanctions in world 03/08 Iran nuclear deal nears completion 03/08 WHO strengthens booster endorsement 03/08 Venezuela releases 2 American prisoners 03/08 Istanbul police block Women's Day march 03/08 Calls intensify for Myanmar junta fuel ban 03/07 China expands influence Central America 03/07 'Z' symbolizes Russians support invasion	03/09 Psychological profiles of world leaders 03/09 Saudi Arabia, UAE decline calls with Biden 03/09 Russia warns US: response economic war 03/09 Job openings stay elevated 03/08 CDC: masks helped protect children 03/08 Hawaii last state to drop mask mandate 03/08 CDC adds 3 travel destinations to avoid 03/08 Alarming: kids severely behind in reading 03/08 CIA director: Putin 'angry, frustrated' 03/08 Russia oil ban could hit US economy 03/08 Administration bans imports Russian oil 03/08 Pentagon: Poland's jet offer 'not tenable' 03/08 Pentagon: Russia forces intact; Kyiv push 03/08 Starbucks suspends all business in Russia 03/08 Commerce warns China firms aiding Russia 03/08 DNI: China military buildup to take Taiwan 03/08 Expensive airfare on way; jet fuel price rise 03/08 'Bomb cyclone' to slam East Coast? 03/07 Tornado warnings delayed: system glitch 03/07 Daylight saving time March 13—get ready	03/08 WA gas prices continue to soar 03/08 Seattle lifts eviction ban, landlords act 03/08 Seattle outdoor dining program thru 2023 03/08 Seattle longest running camp must relocate 03/08 Tacoma clears camp; no one accepted help 03/08 UW survey: stunning levels fentanyl use 03/08 Portland: 2 teens die; fentanyl overdose
Cyber Awareness Go to articles	03/09 Chinese phishing targets EU diplomats 03/08 Twitter launches Tor website 03/08 Emotet growing slowly but steadily 03/08 Gaming industry unites to cutoff Russia 03/08 Sharp rise in SMB attacks by Russia, China 03/08 Mercado Libre confirms source code breach 03/07 Ukraine's phone, internet still work	03/09 Executive order on cryptocurrency 03/08 Identity theft statistics 03/08 Oklahoma hospital data breach 03/08 China spies hacked livestock app 03/08 China hackers accessed 6 state govts. 03/08 Firmware flaws in millions of HP devices 03/08 New method amplifies DDoS 4-billion-fold 03/08 FinCEN: ransom proceeds mix in sanctions	
Terror Conditions Go to articles			
Suspicious, Unusual Go to articles	03/09 One of history's great wrecks is found	03/08 IG: DHS published Jan 6 threat info Jan 8	03/08 Seahawks trade QB Russell Wilson
Crime, Criminals Go to articles	03/08 Kuwait: acquittals on corruption charges	03/08 DOJ charges woman as Kremlin spy 03/08 Arrests: 6 teens in Iowa school shooting 03/08 Ex-Proud Boys leader indicted; Jan 6 role 03/08 Jury finds Jan 6 rioter guilty on all charges 03/08 FBI: food aid nonprofits fraud investigation 03/08 Missouri: officer, suspect killed in shootout 03/08 Judge dismisses Prince Andrew case	03/08 Security guard shot; kicked out shoplifters 03/08 Man killed by police: mental health crisis 03/08 Everett police warn of rise in gas theft 03/08 Man rams police barricade; escapes

Events, Opportunities

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	03/07 Daylight saving time March 13—get ready
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/daylight-saving-time-2022-how-to-prepare-your-body-for-the-time-change
GIST	<p>LOS ANGELES - Daylight saving time (DST) — that one-hour clock adjustment observed by most of the United States — occurs on March 13, 2022, and this can leave many Americans, well, tired.</p> <p>Each year, it forces weary clock owners to shift their devices an hour ahead, usually before bed Saturday night, to ensure being on time for Sunday morning activities.</p> <p>What is daylight saving time?</p> <p>The "Spring Forward" clock shift occurs each year at 2 a.m. on the second Sunday in March — or March 13 in 2022. "Falling Back" occurs on the first Sunday in November.</p> <p>The new shift means the dawn's early light will break through later than it has during the months of standard time and the twilight's last gleaming will extend deeper into the evening.</p> <p>While the one-hour shift in time may seem minute, it can still cause sleep disruptions for some people and lead to a reduced quantity and quality of sleep.</p> <p>In 2019, more than 2,000 adults in the U.S. were asked how tired they felt after daylight saving time was initiated, and 55% of respondents said they felt extremely or somewhat tired.</p> <p>How did daylight saving time start?</p> <p>According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, DST started in the U.S. in 1918 as a way to create more sunlit hours when the weather is the warmest.</p> <p>History of daylight saving time</p> <p>Daylight saving time, or DST, was formally introduced in the U.S. in 1918 during World War I.</p> <p>During the long days of summer, the sun rose in some northern regions between 4 and 5 a.m., when most non-farmers were asleep. Sunset happened before 8 p.m. and people turned on lights. By moving the clocks ahead an hour, backers believed the country could divert a bit of coal-fired electricity to the military instead of using it for an hour of home power. It was again adopted in World War II.</p> <p>After each war, Congress rescinded the national laws, but many people liked the extra hour of sunshine at the end of summer days, so some states and even cities observed daylight saving time while others kept standard time year-round.</p> <p>By 1966, airlines and other clock-watching businesses became tired of such quirks and pushed Congress to pass the Uniform Time Act. It codified daylight saving time, although it has been periodically modified, particularly the start and end dates.</p> <p>Ultimately, the goal of DST has been to conserve energy with more daylight during the hours when most people are active, although some studies have found little energy savings.</p> <p>Daylight saving time could pose health risks, studies show</p> <p>Studies have shown that there may be a health benefit to getting rid of daylight saving time altogether.</p> <p>According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, people may benefit from eliminating the time change, according to a position statement published in the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine last summer.</p> <p>The AASM contended that a switch to permanent standard time would put a stop to what they called dangerous impacts that have been correlated to daylight saving time.</p>

"The position statement also cites evidence of increased risks of motor vehicle accidents, cardiovascular events, and mood disturbances following the annual 'spring forward' to daylight saving time," the statement said.

The statement also included studies that showed evidence of increased traffic fatalities, as much as 6%, within the first few days following the change to daylight saving time.

"There is ample evidence of the negative, short-term consequences of the annual change to daylight saving time in the spring," said AASM President Dr. Kannan Ramar. "Because the adoption of permanent standard time would be beneficial for public health and safety, the AASM will be advocating at the federal level for this legislative change."

Other highlighted short-term negative impacts that daylight saving time can have on human health include a range of ailments, like an increased risk of stroke, increased production of inflammatory markers, stress and overall loss of sleep.

According to another study, losing one hour of sleep raised the risk of having a heart attack the following Monday by 25%, compared to other Mondays during the year.

Dr. Amneet Sandhu studied 42,000 hospital admissions and found that an average of 32 patients had heart attacks on any given Monday. But on the Monday after moving the clock forward, there was an average of eight additional heart attacks.

How to deal with time change

This means the switch to daylight saving time shouldn't be taken lightly. Developing a plan to cope with the time change can reduce its impact on your sleep and overall wellness.

[The Sleep Foundation](#) has several tips for preparing your body for the sudden change:

- Gradually adjust your schedule: You can get ready to "spring forward" in March by gradually shifting your schedule in the week leading up to the time change. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine advises trying to [slowly adjust your schedule](#) by going to bed around 15-20 minutes earlier each day.
- Sleep well beforehand: Obtaining quality sleep in the nights leading up to the time change is important, as well. If you enter the daylight saving weekend already sleep-deprived, it's more likely you'll have negative effects in response to the time change, according to the Sleep Foundation.
- Consider relaxation techniques: Relaxation methods, including basic deep breathing and mindfulness meditation, can bring calm to your mind and body and make it easier to smoothly transition into sleep.
- Set your clocks before bed: Although the time change doesn't officially occur until 2 a.m., set your watch and household clocks to the new time before you go to bed. This may help lower your stress and avoid any timing mishaps on Sunday.
- Prioritize daylight exposure: Finding time for daylight exposure on the days following the change can help your body's internal clock acclimate to the new time. For example, make a plan to go outside, ideally in the morning, and receive [sun exposure](#) on the Sunday after the time change. If you live in a cold climate that makes being outside difficult, open your curtains and sit near a window to take in a meaningful dose of natural light.
- Take extra precautions: Try not to overload your schedule on the Sunday or Monday after the time shift in case you end up experiencing daytime sleepiness. If possible, schedule important meetings or events for later in the week when you've had more time to adjust. It's also best to avoid long drives right after the time change because of the potential dangers of drowsy driving.
- Eat a healthy diet: Although no single diet has been proven to be the best for sleep, balanced diets made up of lots of fruits and vegetables tend to provide the nutrients the body needs and have been [associated with better sleep](#). Other ways to prevent food-related sleep disruptions include

eating dinner at least a few hours before going to bed, limiting consumption of heavy and spicy foods in the evening and being mindful of caffeine in beverages.

- Take a nap if necessary: If you find yourself tired in the days after switching to daylight saving time, a short nap may prove beneficial. Keeping a nap under 30 minutes can boost your alertness while reducing grogginess after waking up.

Which states do not observe daylight saving time?

DST is not observed in Hawaii, American Samoa, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the state of Arizona (with the exception of the Navajo Indian Reservation).

Other countries observe this time change as well, though many mistakenly think of it as uniquely American.

[TimeandDate.com](#) reported that there are different countries around the world that observe DST. Among them are Albania, Greece, Fiji, Egypt, Denmark, and Bulgaria.

Will US get rid of daylight saving time?

Last year, U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio [renewed his call for the entire nation to save daylight all year round](#). It would have made daylight saving time permanent across the country. Several other states have voiced their support or opposition to daylight saving time. But any change can't take effect unless Congress changes federal law.

At least seven state legislatures have backed asking Congress to allow year-round daylight saving time in the past few years — and about [60% of California voters supported a ballot proposition in 2018 calling for such a move](#).

A 2019 survey from the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed 4 in 10 Americans would like to see their clocks stay on standard time year-round, while about 3 in 10 prefer to stay on daylight saving time. About another 3 in 10 prefer what is the status quo in most of the United States, switching back and forth between daylight saving time in the summer and standard time in the winter.

The AASM [conducted a survey in July](#) of 2,007 adults in the U.S., asking if they would support the elimination of daylight saving time.

According to the survey, 63% supported eliminating seasonal time changes and were in favor of a national, fixed, year-round time.

Additionally, a poll conducted by the Associated Press in 2019 found that 7 in 10 Americans prefer not to switch back and forth to mark daylight saving time.

According to the poll, 4 in 10 Americans would like to see their clocks stay on standard time year-round, while about 3 in 10 prefer to stay on daylight saving time. About another 3 in 10 prefer what is the status quo in most of the U.S., switching back and forth between daylight saving time in the summer and standard time in the winter.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Food crisis: prices rise, export bans
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/food-crisis-grows-spiralling-prices-spark-export-bans-2022-03-09/
GIST	<p>LONDON, March 9 (Reuters) - A global food crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine escalated on Wednesday as Indonesia tightened curbs on palm oil exports, adding to a growing list of key producing countries seeking to keep vital food supplies within their borders.</p> <p>The conflict in Ukraine is threatening global grain production, the supply of edible oils and fertiliser exports, sending basic commodity prices rocketing and mirroring the crisis in energy markets.</p>

Palm oil is the world's most widely used vegetable oil and is used in the manufacture of many products including biscuits, margarine, laundry detergents and chocolate. Palm oil prices have risen by more than 50% this year.

Indonesia's Trade Minister Muhammad Lufti said the export curbs aimed to ensure that cooking oil prices at home remain affordable to consumers.

The rise in prices comes at a time when affordability of food is a major challenge as economies seek to recover from the coronavirus crisis and is also helping to fuel a broader surge in inflation across the globe.

Russia and Ukraine are also important suppliers of edible oils as well as contributing nearly 30% of global wheat exports.

Ukraine announced on Wednesday it had banned a wide range of agricultural exports including barley, sugar and meat until the end of the year.

The conflict has not only disrupted shipments from the Black Sea region but is also jeopardising prospects for harvests as fertilizer prices soar and supplies shrink in response to a sharp rise in the cost of natural gas - a key component in the manufacturing process for many products.

World food prices rose to a record high in February to post a year-on-year increase of 20.7%, according to the United Nations food agency, while many markets have continued to climb this month.

Malaysian palm oil futures rose to an all-time high following Indonesia's announcement while soybean oil prices jumped to a 14-year peak.

Soybean oil prices have climbed by almost 40% this year.

SCRAMBLING FOR SUPPLIES

Russia and Ukraine are both major producers of sunflower oil and the two countries account for almost 80% of global exports, leaving customers such as India scrambling to secure supplies of alternatives such as palm oil and soyoil.

Chicago wheat futures have climbed around 60% so far this year, threatening to raise the cost of key food staples such as bread.

The loss of two major exporters in Ukraine and Russia has been compounded by news that the condition of the wheat crop in the world's top producer, China, may be the "worst in history" according to the country's agriculture minister.

Poor growing conditions in drought-affected parts of the U.S. Plains look set to further tighten supplies.

Serbia announced on Wednesday it will ban exports of wheat, corn, flour and cooking oil as of Thursday to counter price increases while Hungary banned all grain exports last week.

Bulgaria has also announced it will increase its grain reserves and might restrict exports until it has carried out planned purchases.

Grain supplies in Romania, a major exporter, have also tightened as international buyers seek alternatives to Russia or Ukrainian supplies although there are currently no plans to restrict shipments.

Global grain production could also decline as the production of fertilizers, which help to boost crop yields, is curtailed following a rise in natural gas prices.

	<p>Yara (YAR.OL), one of the world's largest fertiliser makers, said on Wednesday it was curtailing its ammonia and urea output in Italy and France.</p> <p>The Norwegian company warned last week that the conflict was threatening global food supplies.</p> <p>Russia, which calls its actions in Ukraine a "special operation" rather than an invasion, had been a major supplier of fertilisers but the country's trade and industry ministry recommended on Friday that producers temporarily halt exports.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/09 Russia warns US: response economic war
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-warns-west-our-sanctions-will-hurt-you-2022-03-09/
GIST	<p>LONDON, March 9 (Reuters) - The Kremlin accused the United States on Wednesday of declaring an economic war on Russia that was sowing mayhem through energy markets, and put Washington on notice it was considering its response to a ban on Russian oil and energy.</p> <p>Russia's economy is facing the gravest crisis since the 1991 fall of the Soviet Union after the West imposed heavy sanctions on almost the entire Russian financial and corporate system following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov cast the West's sanctions as a hostile act that had roiled global markets and he said it was unclear how far turbulence on global energy markets would go.</p> <p>"You see the bacchanalia, the hostile bacchanalia, which the West has sown - and that of course makes the situation very difficult and forces us to think seriously," Peskov told reporters.</p> <p>"We see that the situation on energy markets is developing rather turbulently - and we don't know how far that turbulence will go," Peskov said.</p> <p>He declined to outline the exact nature of Russia's response. President Vladimir Putin, Russia's paramount leader since 1999, will hold a meeting with the government on Thursday to discuss minimising the impact of sanctions, the Kremlin said.</p> <p>The West's attempt to cut off Russia - one of the world's biggest exporters of oil, gas and metals - has hit commodity markets and raised the spectre of spiralling inflation across the world.</p> <p>Russian President Vladimir Putin says the "special military operation" is essential to ensure Russian security after the United States enlarged the NATO military alliance to Russia's borders and supported pro-Western leaders in Kyiv.</p> <p>Ukraine says it is fighting for its existence and the United States, and its European and Asian allies have condemned the Russian invasion.</p> <p>China, the world's second largest economy, has called for restraint but President Xi Jinping has cautioned that sanctions will slow down the world economy.</p> <p>Asked about the Kremlin's comments, White House deputy national security adviser Daleep Singh said: "This is brutal and needless war of aggression. We've said all along, if the aggression escalates, so will the costs."</p> <p>"I wouldn't call it an economic war. This is our way of demonstrating resolve," Singh said.</p> <p>ENERGY POWER</p>

	<p>Russia said on Monday that oil prices could shoot up to over \$300 per barrel if the United States and European Union banned imports of crude from Russia. Brent hit \$139 on Monday, its highest since 2008.</p> <p>Russia says Europe consumes about 500 million tonnes of oil a year. Russia supplies around 30% of that, or 150 million tonnes, as well as 80 million tonnes of petrochemicals.</p> <p>Asked about a ban on Russian oil and energy imports announced by U.S. President Joe Biden, Peskov said Russia had been, was and would be a reliable energy supplier.</p> <p>Moscow would, though, now think very seriously about a response, Peskov said.</p> <p>"The situation demands a rather deep analysis - those decisions announced by President Biden," Peskov said. "If you are asking me what Russia is going to do - Russia is going to do what is necessary to defend its interests."</p> <p>"The United States definitely has declared economic war against Russia and is waging this war," he said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 CDC adds 3 travel destinations to avoid
SOURCE	https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/cdc-says-avoid-travel-to-new-zealand-hong-kong-and-thailand-as-covid-cases-surge/ar-AAUN6gU?ocid=uxbndlbing
GIST	<p>Three destinations — including two that had kept the coronavirus at bay for most of the pandemic — moved into the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s highest warning level for travel on Monday.</p> <p>Americans should avoid traveling to New Zealand, Hong Kong and Thailand because of very high levels of covid-19, the public health agency said in an update that placed the destinations into the “Level 4” category. All three had most recently been categorized as “Level 3,” with high levels of the virus.</p> <p>New Zealand and Hong Kong have both kept strict travel restrictions in place throughout the pandemic, even as other popular destinations have reopened to the world with vaccination and testing rules. But new cases in both countries are soaring, despite their largely remaining off limits to foreign travelers.</p> <p>On Tuesday, New Zealand reported nearly 24,000 new cases, while Thailand reported nearly 19,000, according to the Bangkok Post. Under a new self-reporting system, Hong Kong had 43,000 new cases Tuesday, Reuters said.</p> <p>Thailand relaunched its quarantine-free “Test & Go” program for fully vaccinated visitors on Feb. 1. The other destinations have made smaller steps toward reopening. In late January, authorities in Hong Kong announced a slight easing of quarantine requirements from 21 to 14 days. New Zealand has said it plans to lift all restrictions gradually by October, starting late last month with citizens, residents and some visa holders.</p> <p>The CDC factors in the trajectory and number of new cases over the past 28 days to determine travel health advisories. Large destinations classified as “Level 4” have an incidence rate of more than 500 new cases per 100,000 people over the past 28 days. More than 130 destinations have a Level 4 designation.</p> <p>Also Monday, a handful of destinations dropped from the highest level to “Level 3,” which means people should be fully vaccinated before visiting. Those include Mexico, Anguilla, Fiji, the Philippines, Cape Verde and the United Arab Emirates.</p>
Return to Top	The CDC's do not travel list, explained

HEADLINE	03/08 Calls intensify for Myanmar junta fuel ban
----------	---

SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/russia-sanctions-intensify-calls-for-myanmar-fuel-ban-if-the-jets-cant-fly-they-cant-bomb-11646751635?mod=hp_featst_pos3
GIST	<p>SINGAPORE—As the U.S., European Union and others hit Russia with crippling economic sanctions in response to President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, they are facing demands to go hard against another regime: Myanmar’s military junta.</p> <p>In the past year since a military coup shook Myanmar, Washington and Brussels have taken steps to cut off the country’s army leaders and their businesses from the global financial system. But the junta has continued its campaign of airstrikes, arrests and custodial torture to counter the armed resistance that has emerged in response to the coup. Now, the coup’s opponents are pushing for a ban on the sale of jet fuel to Myanmar.</p> <p>Such a move, they say, would hobble the air force that for months has hit rebel strongholds with bombs and mortar shells. According to a United Nations report released last month, the Myanmar military has used jet fighters, combat helicopters, bombs and rockets in dozens of airstrikes, killing scores of civilians including children as young as 5. Human-rights groups and local media have documented fighter planes dropping munitions on or near civilian structures including homes and camps for people displaced by the conflict.</p> <p>“Without fuel, the military can’t use their air force,” said Zin Mar Aung, foreign minister of the National Unity Government, which sees itself as a parallel administration composed of ousted civilian leaders and their allies. “If the jets can’t fly, they can’t bomb. It is as simple as that.”</p> <p>The debate around sanctions—what measures to impose and how far to go—is in the spotlight amid the West’s swift and severe actions against Russia. Sanctions against Myanmar have come slower and been far more limited, in part because Western countries have limited engagement with and leverage over Myanmar. Western policy makers’ reluctance also stems from experience: Severe trade and travel bans imposed on Myanmar’s earlier regimes crushed its economy and pushed it toward greater reliance on China and Russia.</p> <p>But the coup’s opponents say tougher steps are necessary to curb violence across the country. Conflict has intensified as anti-junta rebels have allied with ethnic insurgents that were already fighting the Myanmar military. The junta labeled the rebels as terrorists and has tried to uproot them by bombing and burning villages that it says sheltered the rebels.</p> <p>The nonprofit Karen Peace Support Network has published detailed accounts of early attacks, including a dayslong bombardment last March of villages near the Thailand border that killed at least 16 people and destroyed large parts of a high school. Last month, the relief group Free Burma Rangers shared video footage of an airstrike on Nam Mae Kon village in southeast Myanmar. The group said at least two civilians were killed and three injured. The footage showed a building on fire as what sounded like gunfire and several explosions were heard nearby.</p> <p>“Any way that we can stop these planes from getting into the air, and from conducting these horrific raids on villages, needs to be looked at and needs to be seized,” said Tom Andrews, the U.N.’s special rapporteur on human rights in Myanmar.</p> <p>So far, no country has blocked jet-fuel sales to Myanmar. The U.K. government last month urged businesses to ensure supplies don’t end up in the hands of the military, and dozens of British lawmakers have backed a motion calling for a ban. The U.N. report published last month also recommended that governments support a ban. Myanmar’s Defense Ministry doesn’t disclose its fuel sources, which is why some are seeking an all-out stoppage of aviation-fuel supplies.</p> <p>The Myanmar military didn’t respond to a request for comment.</p>

Industry analysts say a fuel ban is a blunt instrument that could ground army planes but would also bring civilian flights to a standstill. “It would literally cripple any planes from flying,” said Serena Huang, the head of Asia-Pacific analysis at the energy-data firm Vortexa.

The step isn’t without precedent. The EU in 2014 banned jet-fuel exports to Syria. On the ground, Russian entities continued importing jet fuel to Syria in defiance of Western sanctions. The U.S. in 2019 blacklisted participants of what it said was an evasion scheme supplying jet fuel to Russian forces in Syria. Last year, a Danish supplier was found guilty of breaching EU sanctions by selling jet fuel to Russian companies that later shipped it to Syria.

With no domestic oil refineries, Myanmar is reliant on imports for all of its fuel. Data from Vortexa and energy analytics firm Kpler shows that 100% of Myanmar’s jet fuel is shipped from ports in Singapore, India and Malaysia. Major Western energy companies have storage terminals in Singapore, and shipment records from before the coup show that companies linked to Western majors, including Shell PLC, Corp. and Chevron Corp. , sold fuel to intermediaries, who then sold it in Myanmar.

Most of the jet fuel shipped to Myanmar from Singapore over the past three years was loaded from a terminal operated by Singapore Refining Co., a joint venture between Chevron and Singapore Petroleum Co. , a subsidiary of Chinese state-owned company PetroChina, said Ms. Huang of Vortexa. As recently as late February, a shipment loaded at the Singapore terminal was delivered to Myanmar’s Thilawa port, according to ship-monitoring site MarineTraffic.

A jet-fuel ban would require suppliers like Singapore Refining to ensure their product doesn’t end up in Myanmar. Chevron said in a statement that the company doesn’t comment on trade matters and complies with all applicable laws and sanctions. Singapore Refining didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Overall, most jet fuel delivered at Myanmar ports has historically been shipped by National Energy Puma Aviation Services Co. Ltd., which is majority-owned by state firm Myanma Petroleum Enterprise, according to the analytics firm Kpler. A person familiar with NEPAS’s operations said its business is limited to the supply of aviation fuel to commercial and civilian customers.

The problem, said Zoya Phan, campaigns manager for London-based advocacy group Burma Campaign UK, is that standard fuel used to power commercial flights could also be used in military aircraft. “The only way to stop these airstrikes is to try to stop the supply of aviation fuel,” she said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Australia PM seeks emergency declaration
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/australian-leader-seeks-emergency-declaration-after-deadly-floods-11646820162?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1
GIST	<p>SYDNEY—Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison will seek a national-emergency declaration after widespread flooding killed at least 20 people on the country’s east coast, elevating climate policy and disaster preparedness as issues ahead of a national election.</p> <p>A more than 450-mile stretch of coastline from Sydney to Brisbane, the country’s third-largest city, has been hit with extreme rainfall over the past two weeks that has forced tens of thousands of people to evacuate and caused more than \$1 billion in property damage. In some areas, flooded roads cut off access, phone and internet services were spotty for days, and ordinary residents in small boats had to rescue their neighbors, prompting complaints about the response from authorities.</p> <p>Sydney has experienced the wettest start to a year on record, with rainfall totals approaching what would be expected in an entire year, according to Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology. About 34 inches of rain have fallen in Sydney, compared with an annual average of just over 39 inches.</p> <p>The flooding could make disaster response and climate policy key issues for voters in May, when Mr. Morrison and his center-right government are likely to face a tight election. Mr. Morrison had aimed to</p>

steer the campaign toward national security and the economy, his perceived strengths, and away from controversial topics such as the government's recent handling of the pandemic.

Mr. Morrison's climate policy has been criticized by environmentalists and political opponents for favoring coal-mining interests over efforts to limit greenhouse gases. For many communities in eastern Australia, the floods come roughly two years after they experienced devastating wildfires. Mr. Morrison's decision to take a family trip to Hawaii angered some voters as those wildfires hit, and when he returned early and visited a town ravaged by fire, Mr. Morrison was heckled by locals.

Mr. Morrison said a national-emergency declaration would bolster the government's response to the floods by cutting red tape and allowing authorities to deliver services and support more quickly. Mr. Morrison technically needs to ask Australia's governor-general, the representative of Queen Elizabeth II, to make the declaration, given that the queen is Australia's formal head of state.

Mr. Morrison also said he will be sending more military personnel to flood zones to help with the cleanup, with total deployments expected to grow to 6,000 from nearly 4,400 currently across New South Wales and Queensland states. He also earmarked tens of millions of dollars more for flood-relief efforts, including additional weekly payments to families in hard-hit areas.

"We're doing that to give the breathing space so people can have the confidence that tomorrow morning they'll be able to put food on the table," Mr. Morrison said on a visit to the town of Lismore, in northern New South Wales state, which was inundated by floodwaters.

Scientists say extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. Australia is in the midst of a La Niña weather pattern, which brings cooler and wetter weather, for an unusual second year in a row. Last year, flooding inundated coal-mining and agricultural areas.

"We are dealing with a different climate to the one we were dealing with before," Mr. Morrison said. "That's just an obvious fact, and Australia is getting hard to live in because of these disasters."

Mr. Morrison previously pledged to be cautious on climate-change action, but last year adopted a goal of reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Some environmental activists had hoped for a more aggressive policy and during Mr. Morrison's visit to Lismore on Wednesday, a small group protested the government's climate policies.

Mr. Morrison tested positive for Covid-19 last week, meaning he wasn't able to immediately visit flood-damaged areas until now. Local media said they weren't allowed to film his visits with residents. When asked about the ban, Mr. Morrison said he wanted to respect the privacy of local people and that not everyone wants to be on camera.

Members of the center-left Labor Party, Mr. Morrison's chief opponent in the election, have said the government is being too slow in getting resources to communities hit by the flooding.

"Australians need a leader who shows up when times get tough," Labor Sen. Murray Watt said on Twitter.

Elly Bird, a city councilor in Lismore and coordinator at the Resilient Lismore community group, said there are still mountains of garbage on the streets and that many buildings have smashed windows and broken doors. She said floods in the city aren't unusual, but this time buildings downtown were inundated up to the second floor.

"The scale of what has happened to us is just mind blowing," she said. "I think Australian people want more action quicker in disasters like this."

In Sydney, the country's most populous city, heavy rains this week caused a dam in the city's northern beaches area to spill over and prompted authorities to evacuate nearby residents. Public transit was snarled. A video posted online showed schoolchildren watching a vehicle float by outside their window.

	Officials said there was still flooding danger ahead as rivers peak in some areas, but the rain was finally easing.
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Russia bars buying of dollars by citizens
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2022/03/08/ruble-dollar-exchange-barred/
GIST	<p>As it scrambles to keep the ruble's value from plummeting further, Russia's central bank on Wednesday announced that it is prohibiting citizens from using rubles to buy dollars and other hard currencies for the next six months.</p> <p>"Banks will not sell hard currency to citizens during the period of the temporary order," the central bank said in a statement posted to its website after midnight Moscow time. The order is to expire Sept. 9.</p> <p>The central bank said it also will limit to \$10,000 the amount of U.S. dollars that clients can withdraw from hard-currency accounts at Russian banks. Anyone wanting to withdraw more than that from a hard-currency account will have to take the balance in rubles, said the central bank, which is known as the Bank of Russia.</p> <p>The measures are designed to prevent Russians from making a run for dollars as the ruble plummets to fresh lows in the wake of Western economic sanctions, which have limited the central bank's access to its hard currency reserves.</p> <p>"For regular people, the main impact of these measures is that they are no longer able to buy dollars, which, for everyone save millionaires, is the best financial asset to protect against inflation," said Konstantin Sonin, a Russian economist at the University of Chicago.</p> <p>Sergey Aleksashenko, a former top official at Russia's finance ministry and central bank who now lives in the United States, called the move "incredible foolishness."</p> <p>"Apparently, the outflow of foreign currency deposits from Russian banks has exceeded the Bank of Russia's forecasts and put under question the banks' ability to meet their obligations," he said in his Substack newsletter after the news broke.</p> <p>"The biggest mistake monetary authority may make in Russia is to touch private savings — if there was no bank run until now, it's going to happen," he wrote.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/09 Hong Kong's pandemic goes critical
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/09/hong-kong-covid-hospitals-morgues/
GIST	<p>HONG KONG — There are no funeral ceremonies for some of the hundreds of elderly Hong Kong residents dying every day of covid. Their bodies are instead sealed in plastic bags and then quickly cremated, freeing up space at the morgue for more arrivals.</p> <p>Hong Kong — a wealthy financial center — now has the highest covid death rate in the developed world. More than 2,300 people have died since the start of the city's most recent outbreak, compared with just 213 in the two years prior. Those dying are overwhelmingly elderly, unvaccinated residents, but they also include toddlers and children too young to be immunized.</p> <p>The outbreak has been an embarrassment for the city's government, which once prided itself on a "zero covid" policy that kept local infections down. The policy mirrors that of mainland China, where strict social distancing, mass testing, lockdowns and largely closed borders have been effective at preventing the coronavirus from overwhelming the hospital system.</p>

But Hong Kong has been unable to match the mainland approach, lacking the resources to isolate everyone who tests positive or put the city under lockdown. The highly transmissible omicron variant crippled the city's defenses, affecting the most vulnerable elderly population in particular. In January, less than 1 in 5 residents above the age of 80 had been fully vaccinated with two doses, and almost none had three.

That percentage has risen since then, but experts say it is still too little, too late, especially compared with Singapore, South Korea and Japan, where the elderly were a priority for vaccinations.

"It would have been better if [the elderly] were vaccinated in the past eight months, we could have avoided this huge problem now," Yuen Kwok-yung, a professor at the department of microbiology at the University of Hong Kong and a government adviser on covid, told reporters earlier this month.

"Unfortunately, I think the elderly will pay a huge price" in this wave, he added.

The failure to vaccinate this group has now pushed hospitals, elderly care homes and morgues to a breaking point. Kwok Hoi-bong, chairman of the Funeral Business Association, said that public mortuary refrigerators are so overwhelmed that temporary ones had to be installed outside the facilities.

"The key is how to clear them as quickly," Kwok said. "There are regrettably more and more bodies."

Conundrums like these are new to Hong Kong and reminiscent of the early days of the pandemic in cities like New York and Italy's Bergamo — which are now moving on and reopening to the world.

Hospital emergency rooms are also overflowing. One doctor at a public hospital's emergency ward said in an interview that beds are now crammed close to fit them all in the space. Doctors can barely access the patients, with no way to walk around the beds.

One patient, he said, died in the short time a nurse went off to the hospital pharmacy to pick up some medicine.

"It is impossible to stop," the doctor said, speaking on a condition of anonymity, fearing repercussions from the Hospital Authority.

Elderly care homes have also turned into battlegrounds. Almost 90 percent of the facilities have covid cases, and about 4,700 care home workers have tested positive. Cases are also rising in disabled care homes and among the caretakers of that at-risk population.

At one nursing home, a nurse now has to tend to about 60 elderly residents. None of these facilities is adequately equipped with quarantine rooms, making it impossible to stop others from getting infected.

The crisis has made Hong Kong increasingly dependent on the mainland, which in recent weeks has sent thousands of doctors, nurses, construction workers and experts to the territory. But even they are finding that strategies that worked in cities like Wuhan cannot be immediately applied to Hong Kong at this stage in its outbreak.

Liang Wannian, a mainland Chinese covid expert sent to Hong Kong to help manage the crisis, said in an interview with state media that the city's main target should be to cut the number of deaths. Carrie Lam, the territory's chief executive, said Wednesday that while her government was still planning a recently announced mandatory testing exercise, it was not a "top priority."

Social workers and nurses, meanwhile, find themselves consoling families unable to complete funeral rites and rituals for their elderly relatives. One social worker said an elderly resident died before an ambulance arrived to take him to a hospital, his family forced to watch as he took his last breath. Others can barely glimpse the faces of their loved ones before they are sent to the crematorium.

"The image is really traumatic," she said.

HEADLINE	03/08 Russia forces tighten grip on Kyiv gateway
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/08/ukraine-russia-irpin-war/
GIST	<p>IRPIN, Ukraine — As thousands flee the besieged Kyiv suburb Irpin, allegations are emerging of Russian forces looting, hiding military equipment in residential areas, deploying snipers and cutting water and power as they seek to use the area as a potential launchpad to invade the capital.</p> <p>In more than 20 interviews conducted over two days, residents who fled Irpin described a dire and volatile environment where the line between combatants and noncombatants is increasingly blurred. Their accounts were likely to be closely examined by Ukrainian officials compiling details for potential war crimes claims.</p> <p>The Russians have cut off electricity, gas and water to the city, the residents claim, which could violate international humanitarian laws that ban destroying objects during wartime that are vital to the survival of civilians.</p> <p>Russian military also are parking their tanks in residential areas, apparently using civilians as human shields, witnesses said.</p> <p>While the reports cannot be independently confirmed, the testimonies of the residents fleeing Irpin are consistent in their accounts and reflect wider concerns across Ukraine that Russian forces are committing potential war crimes as civilian casualties mount.</p> <p>For days now, a struggle for Irpin has been unfolding with civilians caught in the crossfire.</p> <p>For Russians forces, the city on the northwest edge of Kyiv is vital for a possible push deeper into the capital in attempts to capture the seat of Ukraine's government. In an attempt to block a possible Russian advance, Ukrainian forces blew up the bridge over the Irpin River and block a gateway to Kyiv.</p> <p>On Tuesday, hundreds of Irpin residents made their way under the crumpled bridge and gingerly walked on wooden planks across the river to escape the shelling.</p> <p>In Irpin, thousands of families remain, many taking shelter in bunkers. Most cannot contact family members outside because cellphone service has been cut, heightening their fears and isolation.</p> <p>With the power gone, many residents are sleeping in street clothes to keep warm, said those who have left Irpin.</p> <p>Andrii Kolesnyk, 45, who runs a guesthouse in Irpin, said about 15 troops entered their property on Sunday. Then they parked five military vehicles outside and stayed overnight, "using me and my guest as a [human] shield," he said.</p> <p>"They stole everything they saw," he said. "They stole money I left to run the hotel. All the jewelry, everything. All the electronics."</p> <p>At one point, while he sheltered in the kitchen, they fired five shots through the door — one of which wounded him in the leg, he said.</p> <p>"We are appalled by Russia's brutal tactics and the rising number of innocent civilians who have been killed in Russian strikes, which have reportedly hit schools, hospitals, kindergartens, an orphanage, residential buildings, and those fleeing through humanitarian corridors," a spokesman for the National Security Council said in an email to The Washington Post. "We will support accountability using every tool available, including criminal prosecutions where appropriate."</p>

The State Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment about alleged Russian actions toward civilians in Irpin.

According to a Kremlin readout, Russian President Vladimir Putin last week told French President Emmanuel Macron that Russia's forces were doing all they can "to preserve the lives of civilians" in Ukraine.

James Gow, a war crimes expert at King's College London, said there are no well-known examples of international war crimes cases dealing with the blocking of water and electricity supplies to civilians.

"There is nothing clearly to prohibit cutting water and power" in international law, he said in an email. But under the Rome statute, which governs the International Criminal Court, it is a crime to intentionally starve civilians or "cause conditions where they can't survive," according to Alex Whiting, an international law expert and visiting professor at Harvard Law School.

On Tuesday, more people streamed out of Irpin.

One man in a black beanie and jacket pushed through the crowd, carrying a shoulder-fired antitank rocket across his shoulder and a sobbing toddler in his arms. Elderly residents were carried out on makeshift stretchers made of canvas, bedsheets and tarp. One man in a blue helmet carried an old woman still in her slippers.

They described a city where residential neighborhoods have been ravaged by shelling — scenes also reflected in videos posted on social media. Most Russian troops appeared to be in the northern parts of the city, but snipers and small groups of soldiers operated in different parts of the city, said residents and members of Ukrainian territorial defense units.

"They fire straight at civilian people and homes," said Yelena Stolyar, 39, referring to the Russian forces. "They are shelling houses and killing ordinary people."

For nearly two weeks she, her husband and two children had sheltered in their basement in a group of 12, trekking outside only to find food.

"In the center of the city, a man was walking his dog and a sniper killed him," said Julia Soboleva, 32, who fled Tuesday with her 8-year-old son, Lev. "He left the dog alive. They killed a woman in a car yesterday. We saw the car and her body inside."

Soboleva added that she saw a Russian armored vehicle parked at a train station near her house. "They put tanks behind the civilians," she said.

Olena Solamatina, 34, said Russian troops moved regularly in her neighborhood of Central Park. From her window, she said she saw Russians enter buildings and houses. At night, she sometimes saw dwellings set on fire.

For the past three days, a Russian tank was parked next to her residential building, she said.

Varvara Fetisova, 14, heard constant shooting and fighting outside in her home in Stoyanka, a town next to Irpin. Her house was damaged in the fighting and her family sought shelter at a neighbor's. Then on Monday, three Russian troops entered the house, she said.

"They tried searching for money, they broke our car [and] took our battery from our car," she said, adding that troops "asked if we had weapons."

"They said if we were trying to evacuate, we wouldn't make it," she recalled.

But the next day, they woke up and the electricity had shut off. With temperatures dipping well below freezing at night, they packed what they could and headed toward Kyiv despite the warning — leaving behind a dog and cat who went missing in the chaos.

“If we stayed there for long we would freeze and any day could get worse so we decided to leave immediately,” she said. “It was safer to take the risk to come here.”

On Tuesday, the gas was shut off for the city, said many residents interviewed by The Post.

Whiting, who has prosecuted cases of war crimes committed during the Balkans conflict, said looting “is clearly a war crime” and has been prosecuted in several cases at international courts.

The alleged shooting of civilians by Russian forces in Irpin could be more complicated to charge, he said. Bringing a war crimes charge would require proving that Russia targeted civilians either deliberately or disproportionately given the military objective.

A crowded checkpoint on the road from Irpin to Kyiv became a crucial meeting point on Tuesday. With cell networks largely down in the area, many families were unable to confirm if their relatives had made it over the bridge alive. Groups huddled together as they peered into the distance to try to catch a glimpse of their loved ones coming down the desolate road.

Mariana Bezhula, a Ukrainian lawmaker, said she was contacted by doctors at a military hospital that was now behind Russian lines. They told her there were 40 wounded civilians, as well as sick children and pregnant women.

“But the Russian side blocked the way to them,” she said, adding that she’s been unable to contact the doctors because cellphone network is shut down.

Kolesnyk’s parents were among those waiting anxiously for any sign of their son. When they saw him, they hugged him again and again.

Stolyar, too, was waiting. She and the children had fled earlier. Her parents insisted on staying behind, in part to care for their animals. She fears what will become of them if they too don’t leave.

Then she saw her husband coming toward them in the distance — a sweet relief washing over her. They wept as they embraced, then quickly departed — their hands clenched together as they walked toward Kyiv.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 'Bomb cyclone' to slam East Coast?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/03/08/bomb-cyclone-wind-midatlantic-northeast/
GIST	<p>Despite record highs in the 70s and 80s in the eastern United States on Monday, winter looks like it’s not over. A probable bomb cyclone will take shape along an Arctic front sweeping toward the East Coast late Friday into the weekend.</p> <p>Temperatures will plummet as winds rage and, from the central Appalachians to the interior Northeast, significant snowfall is probable. Blizzard conditions could even develop in some areas.</p> <p>Models have been coming into better agreement about the yet-to-develop storm, which will strengthen from a weak surface wave to a full-fledged cyclone as it moves up the Eastern Seaboard on Saturday. Wind gusts to at least 40 to 50 mph are possible in the Mid-Atlantic and the Northeast.</p> <p>A strong cold front, which could bring heavy rainfall, plummeting temperatures and thunderstorms in some areas, will precede the system.</p>

The frigid air plunging south from Canada will cause temperatures to be 15 to 40 degrees colder than normal in the Rockies, the Plains and the Midwest by Friday morning; the Great Lakes, the Mississippi Valley and the South on Saturday morning; and the East Coast by Sunday morning. This translates to lows in the single digits in Minneapolis on Friday, in the teens in Detroit and Chicago on Saturday, and in the teens and 20s (single digits in the mountains) in much of the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic on Sunday.

The setup

Late this week, two disturbances, one in the Southwest and another over southern Canada, will merge over the Midwest, forcing the jet stream to plunge southward and dragging frigid air toward the East Coast. That will pave the way for a more robust disturbance to barrel southeast out of northern Canada on Friday, slipping over the Great Lakes and passing over New York, Pennsylvania and New England.

As this third disturbance merges with the previous two, an intense zone of low pressure or coastal storm will develop along the Arctic front parallel to the East Coast, probably just offshore the Mid-Atlantic.

The low-pressure zone is forecast to strengthen speedily enough to be classified as a “bomb cyclone.” Some models project that by the time it sweeps into eastern Canada, its pressure could drop as low as Hurricane Sandy in 2012 — about 940 millibars. Mid-latitude cyclones such as this one spread their impacts over a broader area, so are generally less severe than tropical systems.

Models project that the strongest winds from this system will occur over the Atlantic Ocean and Canadian Maritimes, where hurricane-force winds could develop. However, widespread gusts over 40 mph, with localized gusts to 50 to 60 mph, especially near the coast, are possible in the Mid-Atlantic and much of the Northeast during the day and night Saturday.

Tennessee Valley and central Appalachians impacts

As the Arctic front charges from the Midwest toward the Ohio and Tennessee valleys and central Appalachians, a band of snow will develop in its wake. Several inches could fall during the day and night Friday from the high elevations of western North Carolina and the Smoky Mountains through eastern Kentucky, eastern Ohio, West Virginia and western Pennsylvania.

Some snow could even fall south of that into northwest Georgia and northern Alabama and Mississippi, but confidence in flakes that far south is low.

Temperatures in this zone will drop from the 50s on Friday to the teens and 20s by Saturday morning.

Mid-Atlantic and Southeast impacts

Ahead of the storm, Washington may approach 60 degrees Friday afternoon, with Richmond in the lower 60s.

Heavy rain and possible thunderstorms are anticipated in the Mid-Atlantic on Saturday morning as the cold front arrives.

While instability, the “juice” that fuels thunderstorms, may be very hard to come by, there will be plenty of shear or a change of wind speed and/or direction with height. That is likely to brew a line of downpours with embedded pockets of gusty winds along the front. Timing is tricky to nail down, but it may be in the 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. time frame for the Washington to Baltimore stretch Saturday.

Over the southeastern United States, in parts of Florida, Georgia and the eastern Carolinas, a small tornado threat could materialize Friday night into Saturday.

Cold air pours southeast behind the front, potentially flipping rain over to a brief period of snow in the Mid-Atlantic where temperatures may drop from the 50s to near freezing in just a few hours. Whether any snow accumulates is uncertain.

Then winds will ramp up as the low starts sucking in more air upon its exit, with gusts over 40 mph possible from the day into the night Saturday.

There should be a considerable warm-up thereafter toward the middle of next week.

Coastal Northeast impacts

The Arctic front will sweep through western New England and New York City on Saturday morning, but places such as Boston, Providence and Cape Cod could hang on to the upper 40s or lower 50s as they remain in a tiny warm sector east of the developing storm's center.

The day will begin wet and end white as sharply falling temperatures through the 30s allow precipitation to change to snow. The timing of the change should keep all rain in the cards until 3 p.m. or 4 p.m. for Boston, and perhaps even later across Downeast Maine, which will be the last to relinquish southerly winds on the system's warm side.

Winds will howl, probably gusting over 40 or even 50 mph Saturday afternoon and evening. The strongest gusts are expected near the coast.

Interior Northeast impacts

The interior Northeast could be hit hardest by this system Saturday, especially from northeast Pennsylvania through much of interior New York, Vermont, northern New Hampshire and inland Maine.

Significant snow accumulations of a half foot or more are possible. Uncertainty remains sky-high, however, so no reliable snowfall forecasts can be made yet.

As wind gusts may easily top 35 to 40 mph, blizzard conditions could develop.

The storm will be fast-moving, with precipitation rapidly tapering off Saturday night.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Russians fleeing Russia amid crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/5dggq5/russians-flee-russia-vladimir-putin-ukraine-war
GIST	<p>It could have been another busy day at Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport, if not for the number of large suitcases and pet dogs. These passengers were not just going on vacation.</p> <p>Tickets to cities like Baku, Azerbaijan, and Istanbul, Turkey, were sold out. Everyone had a reason to leave: One young woman said she didn't want to be trapped inside the country; a young man said he feared being conscripted to fight in Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "I hate this war," he said.</p> <p>Yulia, a Ukrainian citizen who had lived in St. Petersburg for more than 10 years, was afraid she wouldn't be able to see her family in Ukraine if she didn't get out.</p> <p>"I thought that I would be [there] until the end in Russia, because everything was good," she said. "But everything changed in one day. Nobody could believe that something like that could happen."</p> <p>No one wanted to give their full name, in the hope that they would be able to return home to Russia at some point.</p> <p>After Moscow invaded Ukraine and was hit with harsh new sanctions, many Russians began leaving the country. The numbers have only grown as the government has cracked down on any and all criticism. Internet searches for "leave Russia" have more than tripled, and popular sites are running news stories with headlines like "Where to move from Russia, how to bring a pet abroad and what to consider when relocating." On Monday, the economy minister of the tiny neighbouring country of Georgia said between 20,000 and 25,000 Russians had arrived in recent days.</p>

Although there are few statistics about how many are fleeing, and much of Europe is closed to flights from Russia, Turkish Airlines has begun flying three times a day from St. Petersburg to Istanbul, rather than two. Russia's national carrier Aeroflot has moved its flights to Turkey on to bigger planes to accommodate hundreds more passengers, and the number of flights to the Armenian capital of Yerevan is also reportedly up.

"I just couldn't breathe the air in Moscow, where people keep on talking about their plans, watching films, discussing art and going to exhibits and debuts while people are killing and being killed in Ukraine," well-known film critic Anton Dolin wrote in a post on Sunday announcing he had left Russia. "Every minute of such an existence confirms the obvious, that you are an accomplice."

Expats have been trying to leave Russia as well. The team of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy claimed last week that Moscow was planning to implement martial law, which would mean Russia could close its borders, draft people into the military and "intern" the citizens of hostile governments.

The Kremlin has denied this claim, but few have been calmed. While foreigners have been expelled from Russia for minor infractions or posing a "threat," as correspondents for the BBC and de Volkskrant were last year, this was the first time there was a risk they would be locked in.

As Russian troops shell and occupy Ukrainian cities, the Russian government has launched a final attack on free speech. Calling the violence in Ukraine an "invasion" or "war" has been banned. That was why Russian publication Novaya Gazeta, whose editor was awarded the Nobel peace prize in October, was forced to delete its articles about it. Liberal radio station Echo of Moscow was taken off the air in the middle of a broadcast. At least 150 journalists have left Russia since the start of the war in Ukraine.

After the website of the independent TV Rain or Dozhd TV, which has been forced to broadcast only online since 2014, was blocked last week, many of its journalists fled the country. The authorities accused it of calling for extremism and violence, possible grounds for criminal charges, and editor Tikhon Dzyadko said several staff members have received threats.

"I want to go home. At the same time I understand now it's dangerous to be in Russia as a journalist," said a TV Rain correspondent who has fled. VICE World News has chosen not to identify them. "It's not possible to work, and it's not clear when this will change."

While activists have been jailed and media outlets have been shut down before in Russia, the crackdown on freedoms has been unfolding at an unprecedented speed and extent since the incursion into Ukraine.

On Friday, Vladimir Putin signed legislation that makes spreading "false information" about the Russian operation in Ukraine punishable by up to 15 years in prison. The BBC said this would "criminalise the process of independent journalism" and suspended the work of all of its staff in Russia. Several other foreign media followed suit.

The Kremlin's goal is to completely destroy independent journalism, said the TV Rain correspondent who left Russia.

"There is one party policy, one version of events by the authorities, and that's the only one that can be right," she said. "What's going on now is Orwellian, it's surreal, they're really saying 'war is peace.'"

The crackdown is not just on reporting, but on free speech in general. Facebook and Twitter have been blocked. More than 8,000 people have been arrested at protests since the invasion began.

But there is no real anti-war movement, and no major public outcry against the crackdown. Those leaving are in a minority. About two-thirds of Russians support the "special operation" in Ukraine, according to recent surveys. As VICE World News spoke with people on the streets of Moscow, most conceived of the invasion as state television presents it: A defensive campaign to protect Russian speakers against "Nazi" forces. Even those against the war didn't believe there was anything they could do to help end it.

“A lot of people think that people here are brainwashed by propaganda and the news,” said an IT worker who was arrested protesting the war. “They want to be brainwashed. It’s easier that way.”

“For now Vladimir [Putin] has not destroyed Ukraine, which is holding on and fighting back,” wrote Ilya Barabanov of the BBC’s Russian service, who went to cover the events in Ukraine and now can’t return. But, Barabanov wrote, “he has destroyed the Russia we once lived in. And none of us have the slightest idea what land we will come back to.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/07 China expands influence Central America
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220307-china-expands-influence-in-central-america
GIST	<p>With a library here, a power station there, China is using aid and investment to increase its presence in Central America, posing a challenge to the United States’ 2-century-old diplomatic dominance in the region.</p> <p>China’s interest is driven in part by its rivalry for diplomatic recognition with Taiwan, a self-governing island which has claimed to be the legitimate government of China since the communist victory on the mainland in 1949. But Beijing is also open about its ambition to supplant the United States as the world’s dominant power.</p> <p>Swayed by Beijing’s dollar diplomacy, three Central American countries — Panama, El Salvador and Nicaragua — have switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China since 2017. So too has the nearby Caribbean island nation of Dominican Republic.</p> <p>Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala and Belize round out the nations of the isthmus connecting North and South America, a region first claimed as part of the U.S. sphere of influence with the enunciation of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823.</p> <p>Luis G. Solis, interim director of the Kimberly Green Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University, told VOA Mandarin that the U.S. still enjoys an advantage in the region in terms of military, economic, trade, and cultural affairs.</p> <p>“If these advantages are adequately handled through a proactive diplomacy and a solid developmental agenda, China’s space will be greatly diminished,” he said. “But this entails creativity, the investment of time and goodwill, and a permanent and productive dialogue on sensitive issues such as migrations, corruption and transnational organized crime.”</p> <p>China’s most recent investment occurred in El Salvador, where President Nayib Bukele thanked China for funding of the country’s new national library as construction began Feb. 6.</p> <p>The \$40 million cultural center, located in the capital city of San Salvador, resulted from Bukele’s visit to China in 2019, according to Evan Ellis, a senior associate at the Americas Program of CSIS. The president also secured \$500 million for projects including a sports stadium, a new tourist pier, improvement of its water treatment facilities as well as backing for his Surf City project to turn the country’s Pacific coast into a beach vacation destination, according to the 2021 CSIS article, China and El Salvador: An Update.</p> <p>Also in 2019, El Salvador signed on with China’s controversial Belt and Road Initiative, (BRI) a global infrastructure plan consisting of a “belt” of overland corridors and a maritime “road” of shipping lanes.</p> <p>Bukele’s efforts came after El Salvador severed its ties with Taiwan in 2018 under his predecessor, Salvador Sánchez Cerén, who led the fight against a U.S.-backed regime during a civil war that lasted from 1979-92.</p>

China's buildup in Central America has grown since management of the Panama Canal transferred from the joint U.S.-Panamanian Panama Canal Commission to the Republic of Panama in 1999, according to an article by Daniel Runde, director of the Americas Program at CSIS.

In November 1999, the Panamanian government awarded the Hong-Kong based firm Hutchison-Whampoa concessions to operate ports on both the Atlantic and Pacific sides of the canal, according to the website DialogoChino.

Since then, "Chinese companies have been heavily involved in infrastructure-related contracts in and around the canal, in Panama's logistics, electricity, and construction sectors," according to DialogoChino.

By 2017, Panama had shifted diplomatic relations from Taiwan to Beijing and five months later became the first country in the region to join BRI. Since then, China has invested in over 20 infrastructure projects in the country, including bridges, railways and power stations. As of January, Belize, Guatemala and Honduras are not BRI partners with China.

China's state-back media Global Times published an opinion piece on December 13, 2021, by Pan Deng, executive director of the Latin American and Caribbean Region Law Center of China University of Political Science and Law. He suggested that the U.S. views Central American nations as "sources of cheap labor and low-end industrial raw materials, but also the dumping ground for outmoded American industries."

The piece continued to say, "Previously, these countries had no other choices but to turn to the U.S. However, as China has developed rapidly in recent years, a reference model is being provided for how developing countries can develop from backward agricultural countries to industrialized ones while achieving long-term social stability."

Analysts say that Beijing is using aid in various guises to persuade more Central American and Caribbean countries to establish formal relationships with the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Benjamin Gedan, deputy director of the Wilson Center's Latin American Program, told VOA Mandarin that Beijing has an economic agenda in Central America and the Caribbean, but the effort is driven largely by geopolitical considerations, "including its bitter rivalry with Taiwan and its desire for support in multilateral institutions."

"Given the Chinese Communist Party's intense focus on isolating Taiwan, it is likely to continue investing in Central America and the Caribbean. After all, Beijing likely sees these countries as relatively cheap to buy off, and it has enjoyed a string of diplomatic victories," Gedan added.

Another goal for China's efforts in the region is to expand the BRI to Central America, as a push to play a bigger role on the global stage.

In December 2021, Cuba became the latest country to join China's Belt and Road initiative. Jamaica joined in 2019, as did six other island nations in the Caribbean, and Costa Rica joined in 2018.

China has also increased its investment in natural resources in Central America and the Caribbean Basin. According to the Congressional Research Service, in 2020, China's imports from Latin America and Caribbean countries amounted to \$165 billion, consisting primarily of natural resources, such as ores (35%), mineral fuels (12%) and copper (6%).

Rebecca Ray, a senior academic researcher at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center, told VOA Mandarin that she's not surprised to see China's interest in infrastructure cooperation with Central America and productive investments in the Caribbean.

She pointed out that the Central American region has suffered from weak economic growth for decades. It is also vulnerable to climate change, which is bringing more natural disasters to low-lying islands and

	<p>coastal areas. As a result, according to Ray, these countries have a greater need for new inbound investment.</p> <p>“At the same time, Western investors have not shown interest in starting new projects or being exposed to developing country economies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, any new potential source of investment will naturally be taken seriously,” she added.</p> <p>Despite the need for infrastructure investment in Central America and the Caribbean, the biggest obstacle to maintaining economic growth may be poor governance, according to online magazine Dialogo.</p> <p>“Partnership with China might bring in new foreign investments, but it only deepens governance challenges, given China’s disinterest in corruption, its lack of transparency, and its export of technologies that enable Central American governments to curtail civil liberties,” said Gedan.</p> <p>Microsoft said in December 2021 that it believed Beijing-backed hackers were targeting organizations in both the private and public sectors in five Central American nations: Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, and Panama.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Russia shells Mariupol evacuation routes
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/ukraine-war-civilians-sumy-irpin-refugees-russia
GIST	<p>Buses and cars have evacuated large numbers of civilians from the besieged eastern Ukrainian city of Sumy but authorities in Kyiv accused Moscow of shelling a similar refugee corridor meant to allow residents to escape the devastated port of Mariupol.</p> <p>As the number of people fleeing Ukraine passed 2 million and the World Health Organization (WHO) warned that the country was running out of vital medical supplies, the government in Kyiv said Russia had broken an agreed ceasefire.</p> <p>“The enemy has launched an attack heading exactly at the humanitarian corridor,” the Ukrainian defence ministry said on Facebook, adding that the Russian army “did not let children, women and elderly people leave the city”.</p> <p>The International Committee of the Red Cross said Mariupol residents, many of whom have had no water, power or heating since Friday, were facing atrocious conditions. “The bottom line today is that this situation is really apocalyptic for people,” ICRC spokesperson Ewan Watson said.</p> <p>The city’s mayor, Vadym Boychenko, on Tuesday said the body of a six-year-old girl, Tanya, who died from dehydration had been pulled from the rubble of a destroyed residential building. “Her mother was killed,” he said. “We can’t imagine how much suffering she had to bear. In the last minutes of her life she was alone, weak, frightened, thirsty.” Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, compared the humanitarian crisis to that created by the Nazi invasion during the second world war and Ukraine’s deputy prime minister Iryna Vereshchuk described the humanitarian situation in the besieged city as catastrophic.</p> <p>Boychenko said Russian forces were bombarding the area of Mariupol where some of the 200,000 people gathering to try and flee the southern city, whose capture could allow Moscow to create a land corridor to Crimea. Some roads had been mined, he said.</p> <p>Efforts over the past three days to evacuate civilians from besieged Ukrainian cities were repeatedly abandoned after Russian forces continued to bombard densely populated residential areas, with civilians trying to take the routes to safety themselves coming under fire.</p> <p>Evacuations however were underway in two cities. The Ukrainian state communications agency posted video of people with bags and suitcases fleeing the north-eastern city of Sumy, where 21 people were</p>

killed in air strikes overnight, and Ukraine's deputy prime minister said 5,000 civilians were evacuated from the Sumy region on Tuesday.

The governor of the Kyiv region said 150 people had also been successfully evacuated via an unofficial route from Irpin, near the capital. Ukraine's Red Cross said it had evacuated a group of pensioners who had been trapped in a private home in Irpin, the scene of fierce fighting. The elderly residents were loaded onto buses and driven to safety. Officials said the Russian attack on Irpin has left them "neglected and abandoned". "Our guys rescued them," one said.

Dozens of buses carrying Ukrainians and foreign nationals left Sumy in the direction of Lohvytsia, to the southwest. India said it had evacuated hundreds of its students and Nigeria said 360 of its nationals - thought to be the second largest group of international students in the city after about 700 Indians and students of other nationalities including Ireland, Tanzania and Ghana - were leaving.

Nigeria's foreign minister, Geoffrey Onyeama, said on Tuesday afternoon he was "delighted and mightily relieved [...] A million thanks to the Government of Ukraine."

Ukraine has repeatedly rejected Moscow's offers of "humanitarian corridors" that offer fleeing civilians escape only to Russia or its ally Belarus, describing them as cynical television propaganda stunts and "completely immoral".

Russia's defence ministry claimed on Tuesday that Ukrainian authorities had only confirmed one safe evacuation route for civilians, from Sumy through Poltava to the Polish border, out of 10 that it had proposed.

Demand for safe routes out of Ukraine's battered population centres has surged as Russia has intensified its missile attacks and heavy artillery shelling of residential areas, creating a humanitarian crisis of fast-dwindling food, water and medical supplies.

A team from the broadcaster Al Jazeera reported on Tuesday that large parts of Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, had been pulverised, with street after street destroyed and filled with rubble, bomb craters and twisted steel in what it called "absolutely shocking scene of destruction and misery".

Ukrainian regional police official Serhiy Bolvinov said on Tuesday that at least 27 civilians have been killed in attacks by Russian forces on the eastern Ukrainian city of in the past 24 hours, with 170 dead across the Kharkiv region since the Russian invasion began.

The UN human rights office said on Tuesday it had verified 1,335 civilian casualties in Ukraine, including 474 killed and 861 injured, but added that the civilian toll was incomplete and the real figure was likely to be much higher.

Further ceasefire talks between the two sides were expected in the coming days but after a third round failed on Monday, negotiators warned not to expect subsequent efforts to bring any rapid breakthroughs. The Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers were expected to meet in Turkey on Thursday.

The UN high commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi, said on Tuesday that the number of people who had fled Ukraine since the invasion began on 24 February had reached 2 million. Poland said on Tuesday it had welcomed about 1.2 million people, including 141,500 on Monday alone.

Grandi said that after the first exodus, a second would follow consisting of more vulnerable refugees. "If the war continues we will start seeing people that have no resources and no connections," he said. "There will need to be even more solidarity by everybody in Europe and beyond."

The WHO on Tuesday said attacks on hospitals, ambulances and other healthcare facilities in Ukraine had surged, with at least at least nine people dying in 16 attacks on healthcare facilities since the start of the invasion.

The organisation warned the country was running short of vital medical supplies such as oxygen, insulin, personal protective equipment, surgical supplies and blood products. Ukraine's health minister, Viktor Lyashko, said 61 hospitals around the country were not operational because of attacks by Russian forces.

Russia has made significant advances in southern Ukraine as it seeks to block access to the Sea of Azov and establish a land corridor to Crimea. Elsewhere, however, progress has become stalled, including a long military convoy that has been almost motionless for days north of Kyiv.

Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers have fortified the capital with checkpoints and barricades designed to block a takeover of the city of nearly 4 million people, using sandbags, stacked tires and spiked cables. "Every house, every street, every checkpoint, we will fight to the death if necessary," said the mayor, Vitali Klitschko.

Ukraine said on Tuesday its forces had killed more than 12,000 Russian troops since the start of the conflict as well as destroying 48 aircraft, 80 helicopters, 303 tanks, 1,036 armed vehicles, 120 artillery pieces and 27 anti-aircraft warfare systems. Moscow has so far confirmed about 500 of its soldiers dead.

Zelenskiy addressed British MPs via video link on Tuesday, the first time a president of another country has addressed the House of Commons, comparing Ukraine's fight for survival to Britain's against Nazi Germany. Formal parliamentary business was suspended and MPs were given headsets for simultaneous translation.

An unprecedented western sanctions campaign has so far failed to dissuade Putin from his invasion plan. The energy group Shell on Tuesday joined a growing list of multinationals severing or reducing ties with Moscow, announcing it would withdraw from its involvement in Russian gas and oil, while McDonald's said it was closing all its restaurants in Russia.

Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, called on more international companies to freeze or abandon operations in Russia, tweeting: "I call on you to join the ethically and socially responsible global businesses ... refusing to finance Russian violence, murders and crimes against humanity with their taxes."

The European Commission said on Tuesday the EU could cut its dependency on Russian gas by two-thirds this year and end its reliance on Russian supplies of the fuel "well before 2030", while the US president, Joe Biden, announced a ban on US imports of Russian oil and liquefied natural gas and the UK a ban on oil imports.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Day 14 of the Russia invasion
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/russia-ukraine-war-what-we-know-on-day-14-of-the-russian-invasion
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The US government has dismissed as "untenable" a suggestion by Poland that it could make 29 of its Soviet-era MIG fighter jets available to the Americans to help defend Ukraine.• Russia claimed it was opening humanitarian corridors from Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Kharkiv and Mariupol from 7am GMT so civilians could be evacuated. Several previous ceasefire promises have not been kept, however.• Some Sumy residents, including Nigerian and Indian students, have now left the city on buses.• Two million people have fled Ukraine since the war began less than two weeks ago, the UN refugee agency reported.• Russia's military is solving some of its logistical problems and could launch an attack on Kyiv within days, according to experts.• UK Ministry of Defence says in its latest update that Russia is struggling to break through to the north of Kyiv while Ukrainian defence forces continue to shoot down Russian aircraft.

- **The International Atomic Energy Agency has lost contact with safeguard monitoring systems at Chernobyl** and has [expressed concern about](#) the welfare of more than 200 workers and guards at the facility.
- **Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates reportedly [declined to arrange calls with Joe Biden](#)** in recent weeks as the US seeks to increase oil supply after [formally banning Russian oil imports](#) on Tuesday, pushing oil prices to \$130 a barrel, the highest level in 14 years.
- **Venezuela released at least two jailed US citizens on Tuesday, according to multiple sources, in an apparent goodwill gesture.** It follows a visit to Caracas by a high-level US delegation that focused not only on the fate of Americans held in Venezuela, but on the possibility of easing US oil sanctions on the Opec member, which is a close Russian ally.
- **Ukraine's government accused Russia of breaking a ceasefire agreement, by shelling a route intended to allow civilians to escape the besieged city of Mariupol.** Not only are residents of the [port city suffering Russian bombardment](#), they are also living without heat, water, sanitary systems or phones.
- **Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, [echoed Winston Churchill and invoked the fight against Nazism](#)** as he made a direct plea to British MPs in an impassioned video address to do more to help protect his country in the fight against the Russian invasion.
- **Biden announced that the US will ban imports of Russian oil "to inflict further pain on Vladimir Putin".** The European Union has not joined the ban, but the European Commission said it was [possible to reduce the EU's use of fossil fuels by two thirds this year](#). The British government promised to phase out Russian oil imports [by the end of the year](#).
- **McDonald's became the [latest western company to announce it was pausing its operations in Russia](#),** after facing a backlash from social media users for not taking a stand on the war in Ukraine.
- **The World Health Organization said attacks on Ukrainian hospitals, ambulances and other healthcare facilities had [increased "rapidly"](#)** in recent days and vital medical supplies were running low.
- **The European Commission has [prepared a new sanctions package](#) against Russia and Belarus** that will hit additional Russian oligarchs and politicians as well as three Belarusian banks, Reuters reported.
- **Ukraine's ministry of foreign affairs has said that [12,000 Russian personnel have been killed](#)** in its latest assessment of their losses to date.
- **Zelenskiy has been described as a hero** by the [British press](#) after he invoked the fight against Nazism [in an impassioned video address](#) to MPs to do more to help protect his country.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Oil boosts Russia war chest \$285M/day
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/business/2022/mar/08/european-oil-receipts-boosting-putins-war-chest-study-finds
GIST	<p>Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine is being bolstered by \$285m (£217m) in oil payments made every day by European countries, new analysis by the Transport & Environment (T&E) thinktank has found.</p> <p>Russia received \$104bn from its crude, petrol and diesel exports to Europe last year, more than twice the \$43bn it took from gas shipments, the study estimated.</p> <p>The analysis by the European clean-transport NGO was published shortly before the US and UK moved to ban Russian oil imports, and as Shell announced plans to shut down its Russian petrol stations and oil spot purchases.</p> <p>"Gas is understandably a worry, but it is oil that is funding Putin's war," said William Todts, T&E's director. "Relying on it leaves Europeans dangerously exposed to rising prices in an increasingly uncertain world."</p> <p>Europe's dependence on Russia for about a quarter of its crude oil imports has helped to spur US pressure for an import ban, even as Brent crude prices have surged as high as \$139 a barrel.</p>

Russia's deputy prime minister, Alexander Novak, said on Monday that any rejection of Russian oil would have "catastrophic consequences" and could send prices as high as \$300 a barrel.

Europe imported more than 200m tonnes of oil from Russia each year between 2004 and 2017, even increasing its purchases in the two years after Russia seized Crimea in 2014.

The energy stranglehold held by Russia and other countries with poor human rights records underlines the urgent need to change to clean energy solutions, T&E says.

"We should not simply swap Russian oil for Saudi oil," Todts said. "It's time to greatly improve transport efficiency and turbocharge the electrification of transport to drive down our oil consumption."

Russia is the source of almost four in every five oil barrels in Slovakia and two-thirds of those in Poland, Lithuania and Finland, while in Germany 29.7% of oil products come from Russia, the study says. The UK and Italy import about 12% of their oil and petroleum products from Russia, while in Portugal the figure is just 4%.

Restrictions on Russian oil imports were absent from an EU energy strategy launched in Brussels today, which instead focused on gas supply storage and diversification.

Even so, "nothing is off the table", the EU's green deal commissioner, Frans Timmermans, said on Monday. "The barbarism that Putin is now showing in Ukraine needs to be met with resolve, and also with measures that hurt him, even if they might hurt us as well."

Economic pain from an embargo would be felt keenly in Germany, Europe's biggest Russian oil importer, which paid out \$23.6bn to Moscow last year, followed by Poland (\$14.7bn) and the Netherlands (\$11.4bn).

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Ukraine race to save cultural heritage
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/09/ukrainians-in-race-to-save-a-nations-cultural-heritage
GIST	<p>Standing in front of Lviv's Latin cathedral, Lilya Onyshchenko offered her view of the invading Russians. "They are barbarians. They don't care what they destroy," she said. "I haven't met Hitler. I think Putin is worse. He's a devil, not a human," she added, standing in the historic centre of one of Europe's most culturally important cities.</p> <p>Behind her, construction workers were busy erecting scaffolding around a Renaissance chapel. The friezes showing Jesus – in the garden of Gethsemane, being arrested by Roman soldiers – were about to be wrapped up. Around the corner a team perched on a giant crane were boarding up the cathedral's stain-glass windows.</p> <p>"If we lose our culture we lose our identity," said Onyschenko, the head of Lviv's city council heritage protection office. "Lviv has always been multicultural. Poles, Germans, Jews, Armenians and Hungarians built it. It's Unesco listed." She said she and her colleagues were working their way through a long list of objects that needed to be protected.</p> <p>Russia's war on Ukraine has been an all-round disaster. Its army has shelled densely populated cities, killing hundreds. More than 2 million refugees have fled abroad in Europe's biggest exodus since the second world war. In besieged Mariupol, families have spent more than a week living in desperate conditions without heat, water or power.</p> <p>Alongside this humanitarian catastrophe, cultural assets have been bombed and damaged. They include a museum in the city of Ivankiv, north-west of Kyiv, which housed dozens of works by the Ukrainian folk</p>

artist Maria Prymachenko, some now lost forever. Last week Russian forces shelled the assumption cathedral in Kharkiv, hurling debris into its nave.

In a video recorded early on Tuesday Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Moscow had flattened a 19th-century wooden church in the village of Viazivka, in the western Zhytomyr region. "An act of genocide against the Ukrainian nation," Olha Rutkovska, a member of the association for the protection of monuments, posted on Facebook.

Many Ukrainians believe this vandalism is no accident. In an essay last summer Putin claimed Ukraine and Russia were "one people" and Zelenskiy has argued the Kremlin's ultimate goal is the "erasure" of Ukraine as an independent sovereign state. That includes its language, people and culture, suppressed during previous eras of Russification.

"The USSR was one big totalitarian regime," Lviv museum director Olha Honchar told the Guardian. "They tried to make everything the same. They had one kind of monument, and one kind of artistic style with socialist realism. Moscow wants to eradicate Ukrainian culture. It's what defines us and our identity. It's a memory of who we are."

Honchar – who runs the city's memorial museum of totalitarian regimes – said Ukrainian artists had resisted domination by Moscow, during communist times and today. Singers, actors and musicians had joined Ukraine's self-defence forces and were fighting against Russia. The film star Pasha Lee was killed on Sunday in shelling in Irpin, outside Kyiv.

A group of museum directors had launched an initiative to send funds to cultural workers across the country. They included museum and library staff living in southern cities such as Kherson, now under Russian occupation. None had been paid, with the stipends from the European Commission and other donors used to buy food, Honchar said.

"Russians are used to living in a totalitarian system. They've been zombified. We Ukrainians value critical thinking," she said. "The idea that Russia and Ukraine are the same is a totalitarian myth dreamed up in Moscow. Lenin didn't invent us. We are different." Her museum built on the site of Lviv's Jewish ghetto is closed to visitors, with artefacts tucked away.

This week several of the city's other treasures were hidden. They included a precious wooden alter-piece showing Jesus, Mary and Mary Magdalene. It was removed from Lviv's 14th century Armenian church and transported to a bunker. The sculpture was last removed from its courtyard spot shortly before the Nazis swept into the city in 1941. Remarkably, Lviv's historic architecture survived the second world war.

On Tuesday city council workers in blue boiler suits rescued four limestone fountains adorned with mythical sculptures. Each occupies a corner of Lviv's old market square. Neptune and his trident vanished under fire resistant cladding. So did Amphitrite, Neptune's wife, and Diana and Adonis – the work of neo-classical German sculptor Hartman Witwer.

In Kyiv, the situation is more perilous. In the weeks before the war the culture minister, Oleksandr Tkachenko, took few steps to preserve the capital's heritage. The Zelenskiy government was reluctant to remove exhibits, fearing this would contribute to a mood of panic. Some works are now being withdrawn from galleries, including Kyiv's art museum with its 19th century Russian masterpieces.

Maria Glazunova who works at Kyiv's national film archive, said the city authorities had started showing some of its collection in metro stations, used by locals as shelter from Russian artillery. They were screening silent films and cartoons, including a popular animation starring the character Petryk Pyatochkin, put on in Dorohozhychi station.

Elsewhere in the country the picture is bleak. Concerns have been raised about the fate of a small museum devoted to Anton Chekhov in Sumy, in north-eastern Ukraine, where the Russian playwright spent time as

a youth in the late 1880s. Fighting has been reported close to the museum. An airstrike killed several civilians on Tuesday, including children.

Lazare Eloundou, head of Unesco's World Heritage Centre, said the UN's cultural body was receiving "more and more reports of the destruction of cultural heritage in several cities".

Of particular concern was Kharkiv, which is designated a Unesco creative city "with a vibrant cultural life" and Chernihiv, where the 11th century city centre had been damaged. "There are many others. The whole of cultural life has been affected, and we have grave concerns about what will happen next," Eloundou said.

Unesco officials were in contact with cultural professionals in Ukraine, he added. "People are taking action to protect cultural heritage. We are providing what assistance we can. We are working with our international partners to monitor damage using satellite imagery. We will continue to bring together cultural heritage professionals to put together an action plan," he said.

Eloundou described Ukraine's heritage as "important for the entire world". It is the responsibility of the international community to do what it can to protect world heritage sites. As well as protecting cultural heritage for its own sake, it will also help the people of Ukraine to recover from the trauma after this conflict," he said.

Volunteers are identifying and archiving material from Ukrainian cultural institutions to save it for future generations. More than 1,000 librarians, archivists and researchers are involved in [Saving Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Online](#), using a combination of technologies to crawl and archive sites and content.

Back at the Latin cathedral, the sound of praying could be heard from several side-chapels – together with banging and the whirr of a drill from workers outside. The lavish rococo interior with its gilt and magenta colours is intact – for now. "The world won't protect our air space. In the meantime we will protect our cultural monuments," Onyshchenko said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Saudi Arabia, UAE decline calls with Biden
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/09/saudi-arabia-and-uae-leaders-decline-calls-with-biden-amid-fears-of-oil-price-spike
GIST	<p>The de-facto leaders of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have declined to arrange calls with US president Joe Biden in recent weeks as the US and its allies have sought to contain a surge in energy prices caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>According to the Wall Street Journal, citing Middle East and US officials, both Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the UAE's Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan have been unavailable to Biden after US requests were made for discussions.</p> <p>"There was some expectation of a phone call, but it didn't happen," a US official said of a plan for Saudi Prince Mohammed and Biden to speak. "It was part of turning on the spigot [of Saudi oil]."</p> <p>Last week, OPEC+, which includes Russia, declined to increase oil production despite western entreaties.</p> <p>But reports of frigid communications with Saudi Arabia come as the Biden administration seeks to increase oil supply after formally banning Russian oil imports on Tuesday, pushing oil prices to \$130 a barrel, the highest level in 14 years.</p> <p>However, the US has for the first time in years opened up diplomatic channels with Venezuela, a Russian ally and which has the world's largest oil reserves. Venezuela has now released at least two</p>

Americans from jail in an apparent goodwill gesture toward the Biden administration in a possible prelude to increasing production to ease the price surge.

Relations between the US and Saudi Arabia have chilled during the Biden administration over American policy in the Gulf region.

Issues include the revival of the Iran nuclear deal; lack of US support for Saudi intervention in Yemen's civil war and its refusal to add Houthis to its list of terrorist groups; US help with a Saudi civilian nuclear program; and legal immunity for Prince Mohammed, who is facing lawsuits over the murder of [Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi](#) by a Saudi hit-team in its Istanbul consulate four years ago.

During Biden's election campaign he vowed to treat the kingdom as a "pariah" state, saying there is "very little social redeeming value in the present government in Saudi Arabia."

Earlier this week, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said there were no plans for the Biden and Prince Mohammed to talk soon, and no plans for the president to travel to Riyadh.

Yousef Al Otaiba, the UAE ambassador to the US, confirmed strained relations between the two countries. "Today, we're going through a stress test, but I am confident that we will get out of it and get to a better place," Al Otaiba predicted.

The two Gulf nations are regarded as the only global suppliers with capacity to pump more oil to ease the price surge.

Senior US officials with the national security council and state department had reported travelled to Riyadh and Abu Dhabi in recent weeks to make direct US representations.

The Journal, however, reported that Biden had spoken with Prince Mohammed's 86-year-old father, King Salman, on 9 February. On the call they affirmed their countries' strategic and economic partnership. The UAE's ministry of foreign affairs said Biden and Sheikh Mohammed call would be rescheduled.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 UW survey: stunning levels fentanyl use
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3384638/fentanyl-use-washington-stunning-levels-uw-survey/
GIST	<p>A recent survey from researchers at the University of Washington found that fentanyl use has skyrocketed to "stunning" levels across the state in 2021.</p> <p>The study was conducted by UW's Addiction, Drug & Alcohol Institute (ADAI), surveying 955 people at syringe-service programs spanning 20 counties. In 2019, 18% of respondents said they had used fentanyl within the prior three months. The 2021 iteration of the study saw that number rise to 42%, raising concerns over the proliferation of the oft-fatal substance. In Seattle alone, police seized an estimated 650,000 fentanyl pills last year, roughly 10 times what they seized in 2020.</p> <p>"I've been doing drug-trends research for 20 years, and fentanyl's growth is the biggest, fastest shift we've ever seen — and also the most lethal," ADAI Principal Research Scientist Dr. Caleb Banta-Green said in a release announcing the results of the survey.</p> <p>Of the 42% who had reported using fentanyl over a three-month period, two-thirds of them clarified that they had knowingly consumed the drug, marking a shift from past years where most had not been aware that they had ingested it. Fentanyl has been a leading cause of overdoses in Washington since 2020, as a substance that can be 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine.</p> <p>The added concern is that the method of consumption has shifted from injection to smoking.</p>

	<p>“This matters because the majority of people dying now from overdoses are smoking drugs, yet almost all of our harm-reduction services have been aimed at people who inject drugs,” Banta-Green explained. “So we need to figure out how to recast harm-reduction programs to engage with people who smoke drugs.” But the silver-lining, Banta-Green adds, is that “smoking means (users) will inject less often,” while producing less syringe waste in communities.</p> <p>In King County, fentanyl-related overdose deaths have been particularly prevalent in recent years, evidenced by a 118% jump between 2011 and 2021. Groups like ADAI have worked to combat that rise through a harm reduction approach, distributing thousands of overdose-reversing naloxone kits, and promoting addiction treatment with medications like buprenorphine and methadone.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 NATO mobilizes; resupply Ukraine fighters
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-members-mount-huge-operation-to-resupply-ukrainian-fighters-11646761821
GIST	<p>RZESZOW, Poland—In the space of two weeks, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has set off one of the largest and fastest arms transfers in history.</p> <p>By road and rail, the Czech Republic sent 10,000 rocket-propelled grenades to Ukraine’s defenders last week alone. In Poland, the provincial airport of Rzeszow located about 60 miles from the Ukrainian border has been so crowded with military cargo jets that on Saturday some flights were briefly diverted until airfield space became available.</p> <p>On the country’s highways, police vehicles are escorting military transport trucks to the border, with other convoys slipping into Ukraine via snow-covered back roads through the mountains.</p> <p>The race to deliver arms to Ukraine is emerging as a supply operation with few historical parallels. Western allies, having ruled out putting troops on the ground in Ukraine, have been attempting to equip the country’s thinly spread and outmatched military, some of its soldiers fighting without boots.</p> <p>With Russian warships holding the Black Sea coast, and Ukraine’s airspace contested, the U.S. is rushing to truck weapons overland before Russia chokes off the roads as well. Pentagon officials said most of what will total \$350 million in arms and assistance the Biden administration pledged late last month has been delivered. Congress is considering authorizing billions more. The Defense Department has described its efforts as unprecedented.</p> <p>Governments once reluctant to transfer arms and antagonize Russia are joining the fray. Sweden, though historically nonaligned, has pledged 5,000 antitank weapons. Berlin—which only three weeks ago was blocking Estonia from transferring German-made howitzers to Ukraine—is now sending more than 2,000 antitank and antiaircraft weapons. Italy, long a passive player in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, has also promised weapons, and Spain has offered grenade launchers.</p> <p>The allied effort is buttressed by ordinary citizens in Europe and the U.S., who say they are buying hunting-grade gear online—to circumvent rules against shipping military equipment—and funneling it to friends headed into Ukraine. In Warsaw, a 67-year-old woman is in charge of smuggling night-vision goggles to the country’s defenders. Packed hotels near the Polish-Ukrainian border cater to men asking each other how they can ship body armor to major cities, before Russian troops seize the roads.</p> <p>Still, Ukrainians say it isn’t enough. In videos posted to social media from his office in Kyiv, with the Ukrainian capital almost encircled by Russian forces, President Volodymyr Zelensky has urged the West to send more weapons and enforce a no-fly zone to stop Russia from carrying out more air attacks on civilians. He pleaded last weekend to members of Congress for combat jets and missiles.</p>

Such appeals are coming not just from the top. Frontline fighters in Ukraine's Territorial Defense units have used social media to put out a shopping list of their needs, including helmets, binoculars, range finders along with more basic needs such as instant noodles or Q-Tips.

"We need more," said Andriy Malets, a 53-year-old entrepreneur who signed up to help defend the town of Kryvyi Rih but said he was forced to wait because his local unit has five volunteers for every available gun. Instead, he said, people in Kryvyi Rih now spend their time making Molotov cocktails.

The infusion of hundreds of millions of dollars in weaponry has little precedent in modern times, said Filip Bryjka, a security analyst at the Polish Institute of International Affairs. There hasn't been a Western arms push of such speed and scale in Europe since President Harry S. Truman asked Congress to send \$400 million in military and economic assistance into Greece and Turkey in the first months of the Cold War, said Mr. Bryjka, who wrote a recent analysis of Poland's role in arms transfers to Ukraine.

The dollar value, U.S. and allied officials say, is almost certain to grow if the war continues. On Capitol Hill, legislators are considering a bill for when the \$350 million designated for Ukraine runs out. That legislation provides \$12 billion for Ukraine and its Eastern European allies, roughly half of which would be dedicated to supporting Ukraine militarily.

Ukrainian officials, in negotiations with Poland and the U.S., have pushed for NATO allies to provide Soviet-era jet fighters that Ukrainian pilots could fly, alongside more antitank missiles, Turkish drones, and heat-seeking missiles capable of shooting down combat helicopters or planes.

"We are happy but we are not satisfied," said one senior Ukrainian official. "What we have is not enough because Russian troops are still in Ukraine."

U.S. officials warn that the pace of resupply would likely slow if Russian forces grab control of the highways and cities of western Ukraine, where the weapons are received from convoys rolling in from Poland, Slovakia and Romania. But judging the pace of Russia's advance and when the supply lines may be cut is hard to assess, defense officials have said.

A large amount of the gear going to Ukraine comes from NATO members in Central Europe that were once part of the former Soviet Union or allied with it. The U.S. says that Washington and its NATO allies have sent 17,000 antitank weapons into Ukraine, mostly provided by the Czech military.

Some of the efforts have been financed by a crowdfunding campaign, which raised \$20 million from individual donors in the Czech Republic. The country's government put up another \$30 million to buy arms that have virtually all been dispatched.

"Everything that Ukraine's allies ask us to do, we do it ASAP," said Czech Deputy Defense Minister Tomas Kopecky. "When it's used in Ukraine it means it's not used in our country."

Although the transport planes and trucks are highly visible, the operation to supply Ukraine in many countries has been shrouded in secrecy. Some Central and Eastern European countries worry overt shipments could provoke Russia. "Most countries prefer not to share details because they are afraid of how Russia could react," said Mr. Bryjka. "And they don't want to make Russia's intelligence work easier."

The shipments are also operating through an area that Washington doesn't expect to stay open much longer. Kyiv, which U.S. officials thought would fall early in the war, has held off Russian advances, allowing western militaries to ship in gear more easily than they expected.

Ukrainians living outside the country are using the same opening to drive in military gear bought with their own money to soldiers fighting in the war. While President Biden was delivering his State of the Union address last week, promising aid for Ukraine, Oksana Prysyazhnyuk, a Ukrainian energy executive in New York state, was watching, while texting friends on the front. "Maybe you can find someone who

	<p>can provide helmets and bulletproof vests because the demand for them is absolutely huge,” a Ukrainian stationed near the front line texted her.</p> <p>“They are going to war with bare hands,” Ms. Prysyazhnyuk said. “They don’t even have winter boots.”</p> <p>One senior Ukrainian military official, who spoke Tuesday from his base outside Kyiv, disagreed. He said there were now no major equipment shortages among his troops. Asked what kind of support he would like to see from the West, he backed Mr. Zelensky’s call for a no-fly zone over Ukraine and added: “I’d like to see more Russians in graves.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/09 Job openings stay elevated
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/job-openings-us-growth-labor-market-turnover-january-2022-11646782413?mod=hp_lead_pos2
GIST	<p>The demand for workers remained red-hot last month as the U.S. economy moved past the disruptions of the Omicron Covid-19 variant, according to private-sector estimates of job openings.</p> <p>Employers had more than 10.8 million openings at the end of February, according to job search site ZipRecruiter, a slight increase from the prior month’s estimate. Indeed, another job-search site, estimates there were 10.7 million job openings in mid-February.</p> <p>The Labor Department will release government estimates of January job openings and quits at 10 a.m. ET Wednesday. Economists surveyed by The Wall Street Journal expect the government figures to show openings edged higher in the first month of the year. The Labor Department numbers lag behind private-sector data by about a month.</p> <p>Last year, workers quit their jobs at the highest rate on records back to 2000, the Labor Department said. That shows Americans were willing to leave employment in search of better wages or more desirable perks, including remote work, economists say.</p> <p>Job openings also rose to a record high last year, exceeding 11 million in July 2021, up from just over seven million to start last year, according to the Labor Department. Openings have since held near that record levels.</p> <p>“Job openings are still very strong and we are seeing a little bit of a flattening, but they’re plateauing from enormous heights,” said Julia Pollak, chief economist at ZipRecruiter.</p> <p>Other indicators have shown that the U.S. economy’s recovery remained on solid footing in recent months, despite temporary disruptions due to the Omicron variant. Employers have added more than a million jobs in the first two months of this year, consumer spending rose at a brisk pace in January, and the unemployment rate is edging closer to its pre-pandemic level.</p> <p>With the pandemic easing, some firms are recalling workers to the office or other in-person settings. That may have some employees contemplating quitting their jobs.</p> <p>Talentfoot, a Chicago-based executive search firm, received a high volume of calls after some large companies announced plans to require workers to report to offices, said Chief Executive Officer Camille Fetter.</p> <p>Workers “don’t want to be told they need to physically be somewhere at a specific time,” she said. “That’s when they’re picking up the phone and calling us.”</p> <p>Competing for workers with businesses that offer remote work is especially a challenge for the ones that can’t provide that option.</p>

	<p>Arden’s Garden, an Atlanta-based chain of cold-pressed juice shops, has found it difficult to recruit and hire employees, owner Leslie Zinn said, adding that some potential hires prefer to work remotely.</p> <p>“Retail is one of the most challenging places to retain workers,” Ms. Zinn said, noting lingering health concerns and, until last month, a mask mandate in Atlanta. “It’s different if you’re working at home and you can do whatever you want. We are an in-person business.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Hundreds of ships trapped by Ukraine war
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-ships-stranded-sailors-global-supply-chain-11646754357?mod=hp_lead_pos5
GIST	<p>The crew on a Bangladeshi cargo ship stranded near the Ukrainian port of Olvia heard an explosion, then the bridge was engulfed in flames.</p> <p>A missile struck the MV Banglar Samriddhi at 5:25 p.m. last Wednesday, killing one crew member and leaving several others with serious burns, according to Bangladeshi crew members, their families and Ukrainian authorities. It was the fifth merchant ship to be hit by artillery off Ukraine’s coast since Russia invaded.</p> <p>The war in Ukraine has severely hobbled shipping in the Black Sea, with broad consequences for international transport and global supply chains. Dozens of cargo ships are stranded at the Ukrainian port of Mykolaiv, shipping trackers said. An estimated 3,500 sailors have been stuck on some 200 ships at Ukrainian ports, according to London-based shipping tracker Windward Ltd. More ships are stranded around the globe than at any point since World War II, maritime historians said.</p> <p>The result is a shutdown of the world’s second-largest grain exporting region. Ukraine accounts for 16% of global corn exports, and together with Russia, 30% of wheat exports. Global wheat prices have jumped more than 55% since the week before the invasion.</p> <p>“This shock to global grain supply is the biggest supply shock since the OPEC oil cuts in the 1970s,” said Salvatore Mercogliano, a professor at Campbell University in North Carolina and former merchant mariner. “It will mean food shortages in the Middle East and Africa, and inflation across the world.”</p> <p>Making matters worse for global shippers, thousands of Ukrainian and Russian seafarers are stuck in ports around the world, leaving shipowners scrambling to find replacement crews to keep strained supply chains rolling.</p> <p>In the Black Sea and the adjoining Sea of Azov, which are important food and oil export routes, five tankers and cargo ships have been struck by missiles, according to Ukrainian port authorities. The stricken vessels include tankers, container ships and bulk carriers from Japan, Turkey, Moldova and Estonia, ferrying cargoes including diesel, clay, and grain.</p> <p>Ukrainian authorities generally blame Russia, which has amassed a flotilla of warships along Ukraine’s coast. Russia has denied responsibility for the attacks. Russian forces have been targeting missiles at infrastructure in Ukrainian ports—part of a plan to seize Ukraine’s southern coast to cut it off from the sea and suffocate its economy.</p> <p>On Thursday, an Estonian cargo ship, MV Helt, sank after being hit below the waterline, the vessel’s owner said. Ukraine’s navy has accused Russia of forcing commercial ships to move into a dangerous area of the Black Sea to conceal their own military maneuvers. “Russians [used] the Helt ship as a shield to hide behind it from Ukrainian antiship weapons,” Ukraine’s State Border Guard Service said on Facebook.</p> <p>Russian forces also have detained two Ukrainian merchant ships, Ukraine’s port authority said.</p>

Ukraine's paltry fleet is no match for Russia's naval forces. The Ukrainian navy lost most of its ships when Russia seized its naval headquarters during the 2014 [annexation of Crimea](#). Last week, the navy scuttled its only frigate in Mykolaiv to avoid it being captured by the Russian navy, Ukrainian defense minister Oleksii Reznikov said.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization warned on Thursday that there is a high risk of collateral damage for any ships in the Black Sea. The International Maritime Organization said on Friday that it would hold an emergency session on March 10 and 11 to address the war's impact on shipping following requests from numerous governments.

The last NATO naval vessel left the Black Sea about a month before the invasion. Moscow has warned NATO to stay out of waters it claims as its own.

The International Transport Workers' Federation has declared the waters off Ukraine a "warlike area" and called for further protections for sailors. Advocacy groups for seafarers said many stranded crews are running low on provisions and fuel.

On the first day of the invasion, Ukraine suspended operations at all ports, diverting cargo ships to ports in Turkey, Romania and the former Soviet republic of Georgia, and the Russian Navy blocked transit routes along the coast. Traffic ground to a halt. With few daring to travel in the north part of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, global freight rates for tankers [surged to highest daily rates in a decade](#), while insurance premiums in areas affected by the fighting have jumped to as much as 5% since the invasion, shipping companies say. That means an additional cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars per voyage, according to data from Windward.

That is further straining global supply chains for grain, which already had been hurt by two years of pandemic-induced disruptions. Poorer countries that depend on imports could see supply shocks. Authorities are bracing for price spikes in Egypt, Turkey and Syria. Egypt imports 85% of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia.

On Feb. 24, the first day of the invasion, the Turkish-owned Yasa Jupiter, a bulk carrier hauling commodities for U.S. trading giant Cargill Inc., was hit by a bomb off the coast of the port city of Odessa.

The following day, Moldovan-flagged tanker Millennial Spirit, laden with 600 tons of oil and diesel, caught fire after being hit by a missile, severely injuring two crew members. The Japanese grain bulk carrier Namura Queen also was hit by a rocket.

"The sailors now face a stark choice," said Munro Anderson, a partner at London maritime-security company Dryad Global. "Stay and risk running out of food and becoming collateral damage, or try to sail to freedom and risk hitting a seaborne mine."

The 29-member crew of the Banglar Samriddhi, the Bangladeshi cargo ship, dropped anchor in the Ukrainian port of Olvia on Feb. 23, prepared to load clay and raw materials for manufacturing ceramics destined for the Italian port of Ravenna.

Third engineer Hasidur Rahman, the main breadwinner from his family in Bangladesh's rural south, called his brothers to say he had arrived, and to announce some news. "I will come home and marry next year," they recalled him saying. "We won't be in Ukraine for long."

Within hours, Russian forces poured across Ukraine's border, and shipping along Ukraine's coast ground to a halt, trapping the Banglar Samriddhi and hundreds of other vessels.

From the deck, the crew heard the sound of faraway explosions and anxiously watched smoke rising on the horizon. "Air attack at morning time...May Allah saves all," second engineer Asif Islam wrote on his Facebook feed.

The ship's owner, the Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, instructed Capt. Noor-e Alam to sail out to international waters, but he couldn't get permission from Ukrainian authorities. The crew was told that dozens of sea mines had been laid around the port's entrance. "We could not come out because mines were blocking the channel," Mr. Alam said.

Mr. Rahman began to wonder if he would make it out of the crisis alive. His family in Bangladesh was bombarding him with messages. "We are trying to get relocated, but it's hard," he said in a Feb. 26 text to his younger brother.

The fighting was getting closer, as Russian forces advanced west from Crimea. On Feb. 27, news reached the crew that a Japanese cargo ship in Ukrainian waters had been hit by a missile. The crew hoisted Bangladeshi flags in the hope it might protect them.

Mr. Rahman told his family that the Banglar Samridhi would hunker down in the port. The captain ordered food to be rationed.

Diplomatic efforts to evacuate the crew were accelerating. Bangladeshi officials in Warsaw were lobbying the Ukrainians, and organizations representing Bangladeshi workers in Ukraine were preparing to drive to Olvia to collect the crew themselves.

Around 5 p.m. on March 2, Mr. Rahman climbed up to the navigation bridge to get better cellphone reception and called his family. He sought to assuage his brothers' fears and told them his work would allow the family to escape poverty. "Don't worry about me, I'm fine," he said.

Then his brother Golam heard an explosion. The line went dead. His other brother learned later that the missile had killed Mr. Rahman.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Iran nuclear deal nears completion
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/world/europe/iran-nuclear-deal-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS — With negotiators all but finished with their work to restore the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has made an agreement both more urgent and more difficult to get.</p> <p>Western governments, intent on punishing Russia for the attack, have said they want to wean themselves from Russian oil, which has kept generating revenue for the country even as economic sanctions kick in.</p> <p>But to isolate Russia and still keep oil flowing, the West would lift the restrictions now in place on Iranian oil sales as part of a revived nuclear deal, and Moscow just put up a hurdle that some fear may scuttle any agreement.</p> <p>Even before that there remained three or four outstanding issues between Iran and the United States that entail difficult political decisions for both sides regarding the scope of remaining sanctions on Iran, senior European and U.S. officials say.</p> <p>The deal would sharply restrict Iran's nuclear program and allow it to sell its oil freely on the world market at a critical moment when the war in Ukraine has threatened supplies. But to get there, the Iranians are insisting that President Biden lift one of the terrorism designations of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, senior European officials say.</p> <p>The corps was declared a "foreign terrorist organization" by the United States in April 2019, nearly a year after President Donald J. Trump pulled out of the Iran deal, and any removal of that designation would face sharp criticism in Congress.</p>

Then on Saturday, Russia added a new complication when its foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, demanded assurances from the United States that the Western sanctions imposed on Russia over the war not interfere with Russia's future trade with Iran.

Mr. Lavrov said he wanted a written guarantee that sanctions "launched by the U.S. will not in any way harm our right to free, fully fledged trade and economic and investment cooperation and military-technical cooperation with Iran."

Following a call between Mr. Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, Russia said a restored nuclear deal must "ensure that all its participants have equal rights" to develop "cooperation in all areas" with Iran.

There is concern that Russia, a signatory to the nuclear deal, may see an opportunity to put a hole into the sanctions against it, and the United States quickly dismissed its demands.

The sanctions imposed after the invasion, said Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, "have nothing to do with the Iran nuclear deal." He said they "just are not in any way linked together, so I think that's irrelevant."

With Iran believed to be only several weeks away from enriching enough uranium to create a nuclear bomb — though weaponizing it would take much longer — a revived deal is considered more important than ever.

Iran has regularly denied intending to build a nuclear weapon, but it has enriched uranium to 60 percent, a level that has no civilian use, and has created uranium metal that would be required to build a bomb.

Should an agreement on reviving the deal be reached and Iranian oil brought back onto the market, it would be an important signal to Moscow that global dependence on Russian energy may be diminishing.

Iran can produce more than two million barrels of oil a day, and if these supplies were able to reach the markets, the surge in prices would be slowed.

But implementation, or reimplementation, of any deal would take several months, perhaps until June. Sanctions would first need to be lifted, and Iran would have to export its excess uranium and then seal away the many advanced centrifuges that violate the terms of the deal.

Criticism of a new deal has mounted in Congress. Under a law passed in 2015, when the original deal was signed, Congress has the right to review any new agreement, and the Senate minority leader, Mitch McConnell, Republican of Kentucky, has called for "major hearings." But even if Congress voted to disapprove it, it is doubtful that opponents could muster the two-thirds majority in both houses needed to override a presidential veto.

Negotiators believed they were close enough to finishing that there were plans to sign the deal on both Saturday and Sunday. They were postponed, and the key negotiators returned to their capitals.

In a statement on Tuesday, Britain, France and Germany urged completion.

"The window of opportunity is closing," they said. "We call on all sides to make the decisions necessary to close this deal now, and on Russia not to add extraneous conditions to its conclusion."

But Russia is now a new unknown, and its intentions are not yet clear.

If Russia wants guarantees limited to its obligations under the nuclear deal, that can be managed, officials say. If the Russian demand is broader, and includes exemptions from Western financial and trade sanctions, the deal could quickly die.

Iran, which wants the deal done and the removal of the tough economic sanctions the United States has imposed on it, criticized the new Russian demands. Mr. Amir-Abdollahian told Iranian media on Monday that Iran “will not allow any external factor to impact the national interests for removal of the sanctions.”

While Russia is a member of the pact — the United States withdrew in May 2018, and these negotiations have been to get Washington and Tehran back into compliance with the accord — Moscow’s approval may not be legally necessary. But China and Iran may not want to proceed without it, and Russia remains a member of the commission that oversees compliance.

The new deal envisions Russia taking Iran’s large stock of highly enriched uranium in excess of the deal’s limits, and it is not clear, officials say, whether any other country is ready to do the same. Britain and France are both signatories and both nuclear states, so in principle they could take the uranium; the important thing is to get it out of Iran.

If in the end, after 11 months of painful negotiations, there is no deal, European officials fear more instability in the Gulf and a new race among other countries to build their own nuclear weapons.

Traveling in Estonia on Tuesday, Mr. Blinken said he did not expect Russia to obstruct progress in the Iran nuclear negotiations.

“We continue to work to see if we can come back to mutual compliance with Iran on the deal,” Mr. Blinken said. “Russia continues to be engaged in those efforts. And it has its own interests in ensuring that Iran is not able to acquire a nuclear weapon.”

The deal as negotiated does not include follow-on talks on Iran’s missile program, regional activities or even its nuclear program, the officials say, which were original goals of Mr. Biden.

There are also separate and highly sensitive negotiations taking place with Iran over the return of Americans being held there.

The U.S. envoy to Iran, Robert Malley, has suggested that securing the nuclear pact is unlikely unless Tehran frees four U.S. citizens, including an Iranian-American father and son, Baquer and Siamak Namazi, whom Washington says Tehran is holding hostage. But Mr. Malley has always insisted that the negotiation over the citizens is separate from the nuclear talks.

Another complication was lifted by an agreement over the weekend with Iran by the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael M. Grossi, on a three-month plan for Iran to finally answer outstanding questions about possible past military activities stemming from unexplained particles of uranium found at three old but undeclared sites.

If the deal is finally done, the plan is for a ministerial meeting of the joint commission of the deal among its current members — Iran, China, Russia, Britain, France, Germany and the European Union.

Mr. Blinken would send a letter confirming American agreement to re-enter the pact. Mr. Amir-Abdollahian and Josep Borrell Fontelles, the European Union foreign-policy chief, would attend in person; others would attend virtually.

It is unclear whether Mr. Lavrov would want to attend in person.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Hong Kong Covid crackdown stirs panic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/world/asia/hong-kong-covid-lockdown.html
GIST	HONG KONG — As the government in Hong Kong struggles to contain the city’s worst Covid outbreak ever, some residents have panicked. They have emptied supermarket shelves of vegetables and meat. They have raided drugstores for pain and fever medication. Those who could afford it have jumped on flights out of the city.

Tens of thousands of new Omicron cases are being reported each day, and deaths have surged. The anxiety gripping Hong Kong is not just about the explosion of infections, but also about what the government will do next. Mixed messages from officials have left residents wondering: Will there be a lockdown? Will we be sent into isolation facilities? Will our children be taken from us if they test positive?

Under pressure from Beijing to eliminate infections, Hong Kong officials have vowed to test all 7.4 million residents. Such an operation would require restricting people's movements, but the government has been ambiguous about whether it would impose a lockdown, and if so, when. Just the possibility of one, however, set off the run on groceries and other supplies.

"I've been here most of my life, through everything, and it's never come to something like the panic I've seen by the public," said Allan Zeman, 72, a property developer and an adviser to Hong Kong's leader, Carrie Lam.

The city's fatality rate from the virus is currently among the world's highest, at three per 100,000 residents, largely because many older Hong Kongers are unvaccinated. (Since the pandemic started, though, Covid has killed Americans at far higher rates than people in other wealthy nations, as well as in Hong Kong.)

Hong Kong is one of the last places in the world that is still trying to eradicate the coronavirus, rather than live with it. It has doubled down on a strategy of isolating every case found, regardless of severity and symptoms, and imposing quarantine orders on people deemed close contacts, despite a shortage of facilities and workers. Rising infections, as well as the government's measures, have already overwhelmed hospitals, morgues, ambulance services and quarantine facilities, and forced understaffed post offices, banks and even prisons to cut back on services.

Residents have been particularly alarmed by the government's approach to children who test positive for the coronavirus. The city erupted in an outcry two weeks ago after health workers took an infected 11-month-old girl from her parents and isolated her in a hospital. One parent is typically allowed to accompany a child, but the hospitals are too crowded, with hundreds of children stuck in Covid isolation wards. Officials later said they would organize video chats to allow hospitalized children to stay in touch with their family members.

Kaylah Tong, a 35-year-old pastor, said that she sent her 2-year-old son to a hospital last month after he had tested positive, with a high fever and convulsions. He stayed alone in an isolation ward for two days.

A doctor had initially warned her that her son could be kept in isolation for weeks because of the hospital's Covid-19 protocols, which include requiring patients to test negative before being discharged. That made Ms. Tong worry about her son's mental health.

"How could children be kept there so long without the parents at their side, just because of quarantine measures? I cannot accept that," she said.

By the third day, though, the hospital let Ms. Tong take her son home to recover; his condition had improved and his hospital bed was needed. The government later said it would temporarily loosen its policy so that only children with severe coronavirus symptoms would need to be hospitalized.

Foreign governments have also responded to Hong Kong's pandemic measures with concern. Citing the risk of familial separation, the United States Consulate last week warned Americans not to travel to Hong Kong. The French consul general acknowledged that the latest measures would "profoundly affect everyone's life, with a price to pay that has been steadily increasing for two years, especially for families with children."

Consular officials have worked to help expatriates find travel arrangements to leave Hong Kong, which has banned flights from nine countries, including the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia. The Swiss Consulate arranged one flight for citizens. The Irish Consulate said it had “never experienced this level of demand for consular service for those wishing to leave.”

Hong Kong, a place once known as “Asia’s World City,” now has some of the strictest travel restrictions, isolating it from the rest of the world. The new uncertainty has driven the largest exodus of residents since the early days of the pandemic in 2020, with more than 70,000 net departures last month, according to data from the Immigration Department.

Weeks earlier, Cordula Kotanko, a German management consultant, and her husband had been thinking about leaving Hong Kong because their three daughters had been struggling with remote learning during much of the pandemic. They were also worried about the prospect of being caught in a citywide lockdown.

Then, late last month, the government said it would bring forward the summer holiday to start in March and April, around four months earlier than usual. Officials said they planned to use schools to conduct mass testing and isolation of the sick. That prompted Ms. Kotanko and her husband to pack their family up and fly to Singapore.

“At that point, we just wanted to get out of Hong Kong in order to act so that we could make decisions and not have decisions made for us,” Ms. Kotanko said. “What we experienced in the past two years is that children always come last in Hong Kong and the kids have had to shoulder a lot of the pandemic.”

The outbreak and the government’s policies have been especially hard on the city’s working class. Many service workers have lost their jobs as thousands of businesses went bankrupt. Families who live in tiny apartments have been forced to choose between staying home and infecting relatives or sleeping elsewhere.

The state of grocery stores and pharmacies may be the starkest illustration of how this international hub is buckling under this Omicron surge.

Mannings, one of Hong Kong’s best-known drugstore chains, has had to temporarily close dozens of its stores. Various pain medications and Covid testing kits, according to its website, are out of stock. Some other drugstores in the city are out of sanitary napkins and tampons.

ParknShop, a supermarket chain, has limited individual purchases of canned food, toilet paper and medicine. At Wellcome, another supermarket chain, employees put little notes on shelves asking patrons not to hoard vegetables, meat and eggs.

Last Tuesday, Betty Xiao, a graduate student, rushed to the biggest supermarket in Tai Po, a neighborhood in northern Hong Kong where she lives, after her roommate told her that the government might announce a lockdown. Ms. Xiao wanted to stock up on food in case online deliveries of groceries were disrupted.

As she neared the store, she could see a line of customers that snaked around the street. Inside, she said, she and other people were snatching up items straight from cardboard boxes that employees had not even unloaded onto the shelves. Ms. Xiao said she was able to grab the last bag of bread.

“It was a pretty tense atmosphere,” Ms. Xiao said. “I had to be fast.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Ukraine battlefield successes emerge
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/world/europe/battlefield-reports-ukraine-russia.html

GIST

LVIV, Ukraine — With Russia and Ukraine engaged in an information war that is at times as intense as the clashes on the battlefield, attempts to capture losses and victories by either side are obscured by the fog of conflict and the work of powerful propaganda machines.

Nearly two weeks into the war, it is clear that Russia has failed to seize and control almost any major cities or population centers — including the prize targets of Kyiv, in the center of the country, and Kharkiv in the northeast. Odessa, a vital port city in the south, is bracing for an assault but the Russian land advance in that direction has been thwarted repeatedly.

Still, the Ukrainian government is presenting a picture of Russian losses that is both staggering and hard to verify.

Since the start of the war, Ukraine's military claims to have killed more than 12,000 Russian soldiers. In its [latest daily update on Tuesday](#), the military said that it had shot down or destroyed 48 Russian airplanes and 80 helicopters; captured or destroyed 303 tanks and hundreds of mechanized vehicles and cars; taken out two Russian naval vessels, including a warship; and blown up dozens of fuel tanker and mobile missile launching systems.

"Russia has not lost as much aircraft in the past 30 years as in 13 days in Ukraine," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in his daily address to the nation on Tuesday.

Satellite imagery analyzed by military analysts suggests that roughly 950 Russian vehicles, including 140 tanks, have been destroyed or damaged, according to Justin Bronk, a research fellow for air power and technology at the Royal United Services Institute, a London think tank that specializes in security issues. That represents only a fraction of the invasion force, but is still striking.

The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday that Maj. Gen. Vitaly Gerasimov, chief of staff of Russia's 41st Army, had been killed outside the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, making him the second Russian general to die in the war.

The Ukrainians do not release a running tally of their own soldiers killed in action. But they often note the names of those who have died and bestow them with military honors.

The Kremlin, on the other hand, has forbidden the media in Russia from calling the invasion a war — it is a "special military operation," in President Vladimir V. Putin's phrase, and officially, everything is going according to plan.

Four days into the war, the Russian Defense Ministry spokesman, Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, acknowledged for the first time that "there are dead and wounded" Russian troops. But he offered no numbers, and insisted that Ukrainian losses were "many times" higher.

To be sure, it is in the interest of Ukraine and its many Western allies to promote Ukrainian victories and play up logistical and morale problems in the Russian ranks. According to what American officials described as conservative estimates, Ukrainian soldiers have killed more than 3,000 Russian troops. These officials, citing confidential U.S. intelligence assessments, said that Ukraine has also shot down military transport planes carrying Russian paratroopers, downed helicopters and blown holes in Russia's convoys using American anti-tank missiles and armed drones supplied by Turkey.

Taken together with witness accounts from the battlefield, it is increasingly clear that Russia has sustained heavy losses.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE 03/08 WHO strengthens booster endorsement

SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/08/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=stylncoronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline live updates block recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#the-who-strengthens-its-booster-endorsement-but-still-emphasizes-getting-primary-shots-to-more-people
GIST	<p>The World Health Organization offered a more full-throated endorsement of booster shots on Tuesday than it previously had, though it continued to emphasize the importance of increasing access to initial doses in parts of the world that have been left behind in vaccination efforts.</p> <p>The broad endorsement comes as the W.H.O.'s stance on boosters continues to evolve. Last year, it opposed booster shots for the general public, arguing that administering extra doses to already-vaccinated people in wealthy countries was morally indefensible when billions of people in poorer countries had yet to receive their first dose. It had then supported additional doses only for immunocompromised people, for whom the initial vaccine series can be less effective.</p> <p>The endorsement Tuesday expands on the organization's previous guidance on booster shots. It was released as part of a larger W.H.O. assessment of vaccination efforts amid the wave caused by the Omicron variant, which can evade some of the protection conferred by vaccines and by previous coronavirus infections.</p> <p>The agency "strongly supports urgent and broad access to current Covid-19 vaccines for primary series and booster doses, particularly for groups at risk of developing severe disease," the organization said in a statement.</p> <p>On Dec. 9, the W.H.O. recommended that people who had received the one-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccine get a second dose if possible, based on growing evidence that the vaccine performed better when given as two shots. On Jan. 11, it said that countries could recommend boosters, but that the more urgent priority was primary immunizations. On Jan. 21, it recommended boosters of Pfizer's mRNA vaccine, starting with high-risk groups.</p> <p>In August, it called for a moratorium on booster shots, and in September it urged leaders to extend that moratorium at least through the end of the year.</p> <p>The geographic and economic disparities in vaccination rates remain glaring: Only 14 percent of people living in low-income nations have received a dose, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. Worldwide, that number is about 65 percent, and in some countries it exceeds 90 percent.</p> <p>But the science around boosters has changed along with the virus, and the W.H.O.'s increasingly pro-booster position reflects that. Initial vaccine regimens are much less effective at preventing infection with the Omicron variant than with previous variants, and while they remain very good at preventing severe illness, their efficacy on that front has also waned to a lesser extent.</p> <p>As a result, boosters have become an increasingly important tool against the virus.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 CDC: masks helped protect children
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/03/08/world/covid-19-mandates-cases-vaccine?name=stylncoronavirus&region=hub&block=storyline live updates block recirc&action=click&pgtype=LegacyCollection#covid-masks-kids-study-cdc
GIST	More and more American school districts have dropped mask mandates in recent weeks as coronavirus cases plunged across the United States. But they remain a subject of debate among some students and their parents, and a study released on Tuesday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggested that those mandates had helped protect children and teachers from the coronavirus last fall.

The study, examining public school districts in Arkansas from August to October as the Delta variant spread, found that districts with full mask requirements had 23 percent lower rates of the coronavirus among students and staff members than districts without the mandates.

It was not clear whether the same would have been true once the Delta variant was overtaken by Omicron, which is more contagious and spread rapidly among children and adults alike.

The C.D.C. has faced criticism from scientists in the past for overstating the benefits of school masking based on what some researchers have described as a flawed [study](#) out of Arizona. Some [studies](#) from abroad have also found that mask mandates were not associated with lower rates of the coronavirus in children.

But some scientists said that the latest C.D.C. study had steered clear of the most serious methodological problems and had strengthened the evidence for masks protecting some children from the coronavirus.

“It passes the smell test,” Louise-Anne McNutt, a former C.D.C. Epidemic Intelligence Service officer and an epidemiologist at the State University of New York at Albany, said of the study. “The estimates of the impact of masks are consistent with other studies that show masks have a modest, but important, reduction of SARS-CoV-2 transmission.”

The study compared coronavirus case rates among 233 Arkansas districts. About a third of the districts had full mask mandates, a fifth required masks only in certain settings or situations, and half had no mask policies.

It took into account staff and student vaccination rates and socioeconomic status. It also adjusted for coronavirus rates in the surrounding community — an attempt, the study’s authors said, to partly control for how much testing was happening in a given part of the state. Dr. McNutt, though, said that the study would have benefited from more details on statewide testing levels.

Districts with full mask mandates had lower coronavirus rates relative to the case rates in the surrounding community than districts without the mandates, the study found. And among roughly two dozen districts that put in place mask mandates in the middle of the study period, case rates afterward dropped more than would have been expected from changes in community case rates at the same time, the study said.

Partial masking policies did not show as strong an effect as full mask mandates.

The study did not account for schools’ prevention efforts beyond masking, like ventilating classrooms. Jonathan Ketcham, an economist specializing in health care at Arizona State University, said that could be an “important flaw in the study itself.”

Jason Abaluck, an economics professor at Yale University’s School of Management who helped lead a [large trial on masking in Bangladesh](#), also cautioned that the schools with mask mandates could have differed from those without them in other ways, like adherence to distancing measures. He said that the study could have more closely matched nearby schools with different masking policies to study their effects.

But Dr. Abaluck said the C.D.C. study was an improvement on previous research.

“This study and the broader literature on masking suggests that in places where hospitalization and deaths are very high, the benefits of mask wearing in schools may be considerable,” he said.

Still, he noted that masks can cause discomfort and make it harder for children to communicate. “Figuring out how severe an outbreak has to be to warrant mask mandates in schools,” he said, “requires making best guesses about the costs, which remain highly uncertain given existing evidence.”

HEADLINE	03/08 DNI: China military buildup to take Taiwan
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/8/dni-china-engaged-largest-nuclear-buildup-history/
GIST	<p>China is engaged in a massive nuclear weapons buildup that includes hundreds of new strategic missiles, and Chinese President Xi Jinping is preparing the military to retake Taiwan, the nation's most senior intelligence official told Congress on Tuesday.</p> <p>Avril Haines, director of national intelligence, and four other intelligence agency leaders disclosed new information on threats from China and dangers posed by Russia, North Korea and Iran at the annual briefing on threats to U.S. security around the globe.</p> <p>China's military buildup includes "the largest ever nuclear force expansion and arsenal diversification in its history," Ms. Haines told a hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.</p> <p>The hearing and questions from committee members were dominated by Russia's military invasion of Ukraine, which has stalled in the face of fierce Ukrainian resistance, and by increased fears of a nuclear exchange under Moscow's doctrine of resorting to nuclear arms in a stalemate.</p> <p>Russia's invasion and subsequent Western sanctions also are driving Moscow closer to an alliance with China, the U.S. intelligence leaders said.</p> <p>"I believe that it continues to be the case that they are getting closer together," Ms. Haines said. "We see that across a range of sectors — economic, political, security and expect it to continue." Bilateral cooperation is not unlimited, "but nevertheless, that remains a concern," she said.</p> <p>The Ukraine crisis could affect the ties. China has not criticized Russia for the military foray, but Beijing abstained on a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning the Kremlin's military operation, leaving Russia as the only dissenting vote, Ms. Haines noted.</p> <p>CIA Director William J. Burns, testifying along with Ms. Haines, said Chinese President Xi Jinping appears unhappy with the Russian military shortcomings on display in Ukraine. China is also unnerved that the invasion has driven the United States and Europe much closer together.</p> <p>China "valued their relationship with Europe and valued what they believed to be their capacity to try to drive wedges between us and the Europeans," Mr. Burns said.</p> <p>Ms. Haines cited China's nuclear force expansion as a prime cause for concern among U.S. intelligence analysts.</p> <p>The annual intelligence threat report, made public for the hearing, said worries about Beijing's nuclear expansion are compounded by China's refusal to engage in arms reduction talks, fearing it will lock in the current U.S. and Russian advantages in the number of nuclear weapons.</p> <p>"China is building a larger and increasingly capable nuclear missile and bomber force that is more survivable, more diverse, and on higher alert than in the past, including nuclear missile systems designed to manage regional escalation and ensure an intercontinental strike capability in any scenario," the report said, leaving China a "near-peer" competitor of the United States in the words of Ms. Haines.</p> <p>The buildup includes silo fields in western China for "hundreds" of land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. U.S. officials believe the missiles will be 10-warhead DF-41s with as many as 350 missiles — representing a breakout from an arsenal estimated to include roughly 250 warheads. The People's Liberation Army Air Force in 2020 also deployed the nuclear-capable H-6N bomber, which is a new element of the Chinese nuclear triad of bombers, ICBMs and submarine-launched missiles.</p> <p>Additionally, the report confirmed unofficial claims that China carried out a test of a strategic hypersonic glide vehicle that orbited Earth before landing back on Chinese soil.</p>

Tensions on Taiwan

The intelligence chiefs said Taiwan is another flashpoint in bilateral relations. Mr. Xi and other Chinese leaders are determined to force unification with Taiwan on Beijing's terms, including the possible use of military forces, they said.

"China would prefer coerced unification that avoids armed conflict, and it has been stepping up diplomatic-economic-military pressure on the island for years to isolate and weaken confidence in its democratically elected leaders," Ms. Haines said. "And at the same time, Beijing is preparing to use military force if it decides this is necessary."

Lt. Gen. Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, rejected suggestions that Beijing would use Russia's Ukraine operation as a model for Taiwan.

"I think Taiwan and Ukraine are two different things completely," said Gen. Berrier, adding that the U.S. military presence in Asia is a strong deterrent. "We do know that the PRC is watching very, very carefully what happens [in Ukraine] and how this plays out throughout the entire time."

Ms. Haines said intelligence analysts believe China may be more fearful of taking military action against Taiwan based on the unified support for international sanctions on Russia since it invaded Ukraine.

Mr. Burns, however, cautioned that the problems Russia is facing in Ukraine are not likely to reduce Chinese leaders' drive to get control of Taiwan.

"I would just say analytically, I would not underestimate President Xi and the Chinese leadership's determination with regard to Taiwan," Mr. Burns said.

Mr. Xi was "surprised and unsettled" by events in Ukraine during the conflict and the strong Western response.

"I think there's an impact on the Chinese calculus with regard to Taiwan, which we obviously are going to continue to pay careful attention to," Mr. Burns said.

The annual threat report said China is engaged in a systematic program to compel Taiwan and other states in the region to submit to China's views on maritime claims and its sovereignty over Taiwan. Tensions across the 110-mile Taiwan Strait will increase as Chinese military forces step up provocative flights and naval deployments near the island and Taiwan resists.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 US: no unusual nuclear activity Russia
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/mar/8/us-intel-sees-no-heightened-activity-from-russian-/
GIST	<p>Russian nuclear forces have not moved to an unusually heightened state of alert despite the recent public announcement by Russian President Vladimir Putin that the country's massive nuclear arsenal was being readied for use, Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told Congress Tuesday.</p> <p>U.S. intelligence also assesses that the Russian military is bogged down in Ukraine as a result of vigorous military resistance and problems in providing support for the 100,000 troops now in the country, Ms. Haines told a hearing of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.</p> <p>Ms. Haines said Mr. Putin's Feb. 27 announcement of a heightened "special mode of combat duty" for Russia's nuclear force was "extremely unusual."</p> <p>Mr. Putin's announcement of the higher alert did not use terms for a formal nuclear alert, but it was the first time since the 1960s that Russia made a public statement about increasing its nuclear warfighting</p>

readiness. The action appeared designed to deter U.S. and NATO countries from intervening in the Ukraine conflict.

While the Biden administration condemned Mr. Putin's remarks, "we also have not observed force-wide nuclear posture changes that go beyond what we have seen in prior moments of heightened tensions during the last two decades," Ms. Haines said.

But she said U.S. intelligence continues to monitor the movement of Russian mobile missiles, strategic bombers and missile-bearing submarines.

"We're watching very closely for movement of anything related to strategic forces," the DNI told lawmakers.

Last month, Russian nuclear forces conducted large-scale exercises days before the invasion that were meant to send a message to the West.

"He is effectively signaling that he is attempting to deter NATO from intervening," she said of Mr. Putin.

CIA Director William J. Burns, testifying along with Ms. Haines and other intelligence leaders, said the Russian nuclear saber-rattling is a concern because of Moscow's new warfighting doctrine of "escalate to de-escalate" during a regional conflict.

Russia will use tactical nuclear strikes "in extremis" if its forces continue to falter in pacifying Ukraine and if U.S. and NATO forces join the war.

Defense Intelligence Agency Director Army Lt. Gen. D. Scott Berrier warned that the danger of nuclear escalation in Eastern Europe is real and that Mr. Putin has invested in developing new tactical nuclear arms that provide an asymmetric military advantage.

"I also believe that when he says something, we should listen very, very carefully and take him at his word," Gen. Berrier said.

Ms. Haines said the Russian military plan called for rapidly seizing Kyiv as a way to prevent the United States and NATO from rapidly sending weapons to Ukraine.

"Moreover we assess Moscow underestimated the end strength of Ukraine's resistance and the degree of internal military challenges we are observing, which include a plan, morale issues and considerable logistical issues," she said.

Mr. Putin anticipated some of the Western sanctions imposed on the government in the aftermath of the invasion, but was not expecting the harsh reaction from the United States and Europe, U.S. analysts believe.

However, "our analysts assess that Putin is unlikely to be deterred by such setbacks and may escalate to achieve neutrality to prevent [Ukraine] from further integrating with the U.S. and NATO," she said. The Russian leader, she added, remains confident he can defeat Ukraine without triggering a conflict with NATO.

National Security Agency Director Gen. Paul Nakasone testified that he is concerned Moscow will launch cyberattacks against Ukraine that could spread beyond the country.

Cyberattacks by Russia could strike U.S. allies and ultimately critical U.S. infrastructure such as electric grids, transportation and communications networks, Gen. Nakasone said.

“We’re very concerned about the risk of the spillover effect” of cyberattacks in Ukraine, said FBI Director Christopher A. Wray said, noting the GRU Russian military intelligence service attacks several years ago called “NotPetya.”

NotPetya is a family of encrypting malware that infected tens of thousands of computer networks around the world through the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Noting Russia’s military problems in the early days of the two-week-old invasion, Ms. Haines said the Russians failed to rapidly seize the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv and that the operational plan was proving flawed, resulting in heavy casualties, supply line problems and low morale.

Russian artillery attacks and airstrikes also are being carried out against civilians, and the intelligence community has begun documenting the abuses in order to hold the Russians accountable in the future.

Gen. Berrier, the DIA director, said estimates of Russian losses in Ukraine range from 2,000 to 4,000 troops killed.

Ms. Haines said it is not clear whether Russia will continue the current campaign or take it to a higher level of violence.

Capturing Ukraine will require more Russian soldiers than are currently in the country and there are signs that military rules of engagement have been loosened.

“We judge it will be especially challenging for the Russians to hold and control Ukrainian territory and install a sustainable regime in the face of what we assess to be a persistent insurgency,” Ms. Haines said. “And the human toll of the conflict is already considerable and only increasing.”

The CIA’s Mr. Burns, a Russia expert, said Mr. Putin is determined to dominate and control Ukraine to shape its geopolitical orientation.

“This is a matter of deep personal conviction for him. He’s been stewing in a combustible combination of grievance and ambition for many years. That personal conviction matters more than ever in the Russian system,” he said.

Mr. Putin launched the war thinking Ukraine was weak and easily bullied and that the Europeans were distracted by other political issues, Mr. Burns said. The Russian leader also believed he had “sanctions-proofed” the economy and was confident in the modernized Russian armed forces.

“He’s been proven wrong on every count,” he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Russia military solving logistical problems
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/08/russia-solving-logistics-problems-and-could-attack-kyiv-within-days-experts
GIST	<p>Russia’s surprisingly chaotic attack on Kyiv has seen thousands of troops and hundreds of vehicles stuck on the roads to the north-west for several days – but several military analysts believe Moscow is gradually overcoming its logistics problems and could be able to mount an assault on the capital within days.</p> <p>The influential Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based thinktank, concluded on Monday evening that Russian forces were now “concentrating in the eastern, north-western and western outskirts of Kyiv” in preparation for an “assault on the capital in the coming 24-96 hours”.</p> <p>Its success, the thinktank added, would depend in part on how effectively Russian troops had been able to “resupply, reorganise and plan” after an initial invasion that experts believe fell apart due to flawed</p>

assumptions – where the military did not, in the first instance, prepare for a strategic ground offensive against a determined and hostile Ukraine.

“No part of the military operation looked rational or what you would expect them to do,” said Michael Kofman, the director of the Russia studies programme at the CNA thinktank.

Lightly armoured units outran air cover, making failed attempts to march into both Kyiv and Kharkiv in the first days of the conflict, reflecting, Kofman said, that soldiers were “told they were going to help Ukraine liberate themselves”.

What then happened, to the north-west of Kyiv, was that one of the Russian columns heading towards the capital – a vast, 40-mile long force of about 15,000 troops – appeared to become stuck, with vehicles running out of fuel or breaking down.

This created a large traffic jam which – because of the limited available roads and muddy surrounding countryside – was hard to untangle.

Social media images of military vehicles stuck in the mud prompted one expert to suggest that the Russian army had engaged in “poor truck management practices”, where vehicles had been left parked for so long that the tyre sidewalls had become brittle or had even rotted, meaning they were vulnerable to puncture.

But, speaking at an event organised by the Rusi (Royal United Services Institute) thinktank, Kofman said he believed “the logistics problem is oversold” and the problem faced by the invaders was more basic – that it was “extremely hard to undo” the traffic jam problem once it emerged. “Militaries often have to learn problems the hard way,” he added.

Gradually, experts believe, Russia has become more careful about keeping its troops within the protection of its air defences – while at the same time, the problems of the north-west, arguably the most direct invasion route to the capital, have not necessarily been replicated elsewhere.

Russian forces appear to be advancing to the east of the capital to the suburb of Brovary, according to video posted on social media on Tuesday, in a developing attempt to encircle the capital.

And, despite the logistics problems in the north-west, Ukrainian forces have not been able to make a significant attempt to destroy the advancing convoy, partly due the limited air power available to Kyiv’s armed forces.

The next few days are likely to be critical. Nick Reynolds, a land warfare expert at Rusi, said he believed that while the Russian military would not have solved its logistical problems, efforts would have been made to resupply at least part of the invading forces.

“The question is whether it will be in sufficiently good shape to attempt to complete the encirclement of Kyiv,” Reynolds said, “given the physical and psychological hammering that their forces have taken while they were in a state of confused disorganisation.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Food companies pause Russia operations
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/business/mcdonalds-russia-starbucks-pepsi-coca-cola.html
GIST	<p>When McDonald’s opened its doors in Moscow’s Pushkin Square in 1990, it was welcomed by more than 30,000 Russians who happily waited hours in line, eager to spend a sizable chunk of their daily wages for a taste of America.</p> <p>Through burgers and fries, a food diplomacy was forged, one that flourished over the past three decades as corporations like McDonald’s and PepsiCo, private investment firms, and individuals plunged billions of</p>

dollars into building factories and restaurants to bring food, culture and good-old American capitalism to Russia. It was perestroika and glasnost sandwiched between two buns.

“McDonald’s was more than the opening of a simple restaurant,” Marc Carena, a former managing director of McDonald’s Russia, [told Voice of America](#) in 2020 when the Golden Arches celebrated the 30th anniversary of its first location in what was the Soviet Union. “It came to symbolize the entire opening of the U.S.S.R. to the West.”

But Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has changed everything, and food companies and restaurant chains have struggled with how to respond. Amid mounting pressure to act, McDonald’s announced on Tuesday that it was [temporarily closing](#) its nearly 850 locations in Russia and halting operations in the country.

“In the 30-plus years that McDonald’s has operated in Russia, we’ve become an essential part of the 850 communities in which we operate,” Chris Kempczinski, the company’s chief executive, said in a statement announcing the move. He noted that the company employed 62,000 people in the country.

Soon after the McDonald’s announcement, other prominent food companies and restaurants followed. Starbucks said it, too, was closing all of its locations in Russia, where they are owned and operated by the Kuwaiti conglomerate [Alshaya Group](#). [Coca-Cola](#) said it was halting sales there.

And PepsiCo, whose products have been in Russia since the early 1970s, said it would no longer sell Pepsi and 7-Up there but would continue to produce dairy and baby food products in the country as a “humanitarian” effort and to keep tens of thousands manufacturing and farm workers employed.

Investors, as well as social media users, have been applying pressure on businesses to pull out of Russia, [especially fast-food chains](#), which have been criticized for lagging behind other companies with decisions about their Russia operations.

For food companies that have spent decades cultivating the Russian market, the act of pausing or ceasing operations in the country is complex. It involves unwinding often byzantine local supply and manufacturing chains, addressing the fates of tens of thousands of Russian employees, and untangling close ties with Russian banks, investors and others that allowed them to flourish all these years.

Russian operations make up only 3 percent of McDonald’s operating income but 9 percent of its revenue. Likewise, Russia accounts for \$3.4 billion, or 4 percent, of PepsiCo’s annual revenue of \$79.4 billion. The company says on its [website](#) that it is the largest food and beverage manufacturer in Russia. It owns more than 20 factories in the country.

“PepsiCo has been there forever. PepsiCo was there under Nixon,” said Bruce W. Bean, a professor emeritus at Michigan State University’s law school who, as an American lawyer in Russia, worked with companies making investments there.

“Obviously, PepsiCo can walk away from the business,” Mr. Bean added. “It will hurt them, but it will hurt the Russians who have picked up the business, the Russians that distribute its product — it hurts them more.”

Some companies — like Yum Brands and Papa John’s, which have hundreds of restaurants bearing their names across Russia — most likely have less control over whether those restaurants close because many are owned by individuals or groups of investors through franchise agreements, franchise experts said.

“It’s messy,” said Ben Lawrence, a professor of franchise entrepreneurship at Georgia State University. As long as the franchisees are meeting the requirements under their agreement and paying the royalty fees, it’s hard to tell them to shut down, he said.

Yum, which owns KFC and Pizza Hut, said on Tuesday that it was suspending operations at 70 company-owned KFCs and all 50 franchise-owned Pizza Huts in Russia. (The vast majority of the 1,000 KFCs in

Russia are franchise-owned and, at this time, not part of these suspensions.) Yum also said it would suspend all “investment and restaurant development” in Russia and divert any profits from the region to humanitarian efforts.

McDonald’s, which has invested millions of dollars into building restaurants in Russia and is a symbol of American culture, has felt the impact of geopolitics before. In 2014, when the United States and other nations imposed economic sanctions on Russia over its annexation of Crimea, the authorities [suddenly closed down](#) a number of McDonald’s locations in Russia, including in Pushkin Square, citing sanitary conditions. The Pushkin Square location [reopened](#) 90 days later.

For the better part of the last two decades, Russia has been one of the fastest-growing markets for American brands, particularly fast-food chains. McDonald’s, KFC, Subway and others thrived not only because they were a midday glimpse of Western civilization but also because they were relatively cheap places to grab a meal.

Visits to fast-food restaurants in Russia in 2018 grew 13 percent, according to a report by the research firm [NPD Group](#), as consumers turned to the inexpensive restaurants for “the best in terms of price and portion size.” Last year, traffic jumped 21 percent as the industry rebounded from Covid-19, the group noted.

“I could succeed in my sleep, there is so much opportunity here,” Christopher Wynne said in a New York Times [interview](#) in 2011. A Colorado native who arrived in Russia with the National Nuclear Security Administration in the early 2000s, Mr. Wynne soon saw other opportunities, buying into and becoming the largest Papa John’s pizza franchisee in Russia. (He also owned restaurants in Poland and Germany.)

In May last year, Mr. Wynne’s company, PJ Western, which now holds the exclusive rights to sell Papa John’s pizza in the region, [showed plans](#) to open about 30 stores each year in Russia through 2029 and forecast that sales would more than quadruple during that time.

The document also shows the close ties that Mr. Wynne has forged with others to expand the business in Russia. Partners include Alex Ovechkin, the Washington Capitals hockey star, who has previously expressed support for Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president; the Finnish private-equity firm CapMan; and the Russian private-equity firm [Baring Vostok](#).

Emails sent to PJ Western, Papa John’s, Mr. Ovechkin, CapMan and Baring Vostok seeking comment were not returned.

After McDonald’s recognized the precariousness of its position in 2014, it worked hard to show that it is one of the most “Russified” foreign corporations in the country, said Mr. Carena, the former managing director of McDonald’s Russia. The company, which owns 84 percent of its 847 restaurants in Russia, employed tens of thousands of people, sourced all of its food and packaging locally and was the largest taxpayer to Russia in the food industry, Mr. Carena [told CEO Magazine](#) a year ago. (He now works for the confection company Mars Wrigley.)

“Over the last two years, we’ve been more proactive in showing the authorities how Russified we are and how much we really do contribute to the economy,” Mr. Carena told the magazine. “We produce everything locally, and, apart from me, everyone else in the company is Russian. We are very much local, and we support local businesses and communities.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Ukraine leader defiant, vows no surrender
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/world/europe/ukraine-russia-zelensky.html
GIST	LONDON — With Ukraine’s outgunned army holding firm despite Russian bombardments that have displaced millions of civilians, the war in Ukraine has become a grim spectacle of resistance, no one more

defiant than the country's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, who vowed on Tuesday never to give in to Russia's tanks, troops or artillery shells.

In a dramatic video address to Britain's Parliament, clad in his now-famous military fatigue T-shirt, Mr. Zelensky echoed Winston Churchill's famous words of no surrender to the same chamber at the dawn of World War II as Britain faced a looming onslaught from Nazi Germany.

"We will fight till the end, at sea, in the air," Mr. Zelensky said with the blue-and-yellow Ukrainian flag draped behind him. "We will fight in the forests, in the fields, on the shores, in the streets."

The speech, the first ever by a foreign leader to the House of Commons, was the climax of Mr. Zelensky's darkest-hour messaging to fellow Ukrainians and the world in what has become a typical 20-hour day for him in Kyiv, the besieged capital.

In his daily speech to the nation, he claimed that Ukraine had inflicted 30 years of losses on Russia's air force in 13 days. And in an internet video posted Monday night from his presidential office, he all but taunted President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

"I'm not hiding," Mr. Zelensky said. "I'm not afraid of anyone."

Nearly two weeks into Russia's war, it was becoming ever clearer that the Kremlin's military planners, not to mention Mr. Putin himself, had dramatically miscalculated not only the grit of Ukrainian resistance but also the calamitous economic consequences for Russia, which on Tuesday faced [a major new embargo of its oil exports](#) and a growing exodus of large American companies.

At the same time, the scope of the humanitarian disaster across Ukraine was growing by the hour, as were the reverberations among its European neighbors. Russian forces continued to batter Kyiv and other cities. In Mariupol, a strategically crucial port city surrounded by Russian forces, hundreds of thousands of people remained trapped without water, electricity and other basic services.

In his speech to British lawmakers, Mr. Zelensky reiterated his plea for the NATO alliance to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, something NATO leaders have ruled out because they fear it would trigger a wider military clash between the West and Russia.

But the West further tightened the economic vise on Russia, with the United States and Britain announcing oil embargoes and a new raft of business suspensions by big-name American corporations including [McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Pepsico and Starbucks](#). McDonald's move was especially noteworthy since the opening of the chain's first outlet in the Soviet Union, on Pushkin Square in January 1990, was marked by throngs of Russians pushing and shoving to get inside and place their "Beeg Mek" orders.

"Now is not the time to let up," Britain's foreign secretary, Liz Truss, told reporters on Tuesday as she pledged that the world's advanced industrialized countries would work out a timetable to reduce their dependence on Russian oil and gas.

Despite these statements of solidarity and Mr. Zelensky's expressions of defiance, the war's human cost has risen fearfully. The United Nations reported that more than two million Ukrainians — half of them children — had fled the country, the fastest-growing refugee crisis to afflict Europe since World War II.

Poland, a major recipient of the fleeing Ukrainians, said it was rushing to convert schools, churches and stadiums into temporary housing for them. "Shelters are being created rapidly," said Piotr Bystrianin, head of the Ocalenie Foundation, a Polish refugee charity. "But it's not enough."

The Russian military's invasion force, estimated to be roughly 200,000 troops when the war began on Feb. 24, had still not taken any major Ukrainian cities except the southern port of Kherson, despite repeated artillery and rocket barrages on other strategic urban centers. The targets included Mariupol and nearby

Mykolaiv in the southeast, the eastern city of Kharkiv, and Kyiv, where Mr. Zelensky offered a video tour of his office on Monday evening.

Addressing British lawmakers on Tuesday, Mr. Zelensky offered a vivid, day-by-day summary of the misery Russia has wrought since it invaded. From the cruise-missile strikes that shattered the pre-dawn peace as the assault began to the panic of trapped residents in Mariupol, he painted a picture of a country in the grip of a humanitarian disaster.

“Everybody can hear that people don’t have water,” Mr. Zelensky said of those under siege in Mariupol. Russia’s shelling of hospitals and evacuation routes, he said, had killed scores of innocent civilians, including children.

“These are the children who could have lived,” he said to the packed and rapt chamber, “but they took them away from us.”

However long the odds Ukrainians faced or the horrors they were enduring, Mr. Zelensky said, they had made the decision to endure. To Shakespeare’s elemental question, “to be or not to be,” he said, Ukrainians had decided “to be.”

After days of failed evacuation efforts because of Russian attacks, at least one humanitarian corridor lasted long enough to allow hundreds of civilians to escape from Sumy, a war-battered city east of Kyiv. People left in a convoy of buses led by the Red Cross, despite shooting near the evacuation route, said Dmytro Zhyvtsky, governor of the region.

Among those brought to safety were about 700 students from India, the Indian government said. The students were headed to Poltava in central Ukraine and would then board trains to the western part of the country, according to India’s Foreign Ministry.

Almost since the first day of the war, the Ukrainian government has made efforts to evacuate people from cities under attack or under threat. The national rail service alone has transported more than one million people on special evacuation trains.

But attempts to open a humanitarian corridor in places of active fighting had mostly failed until now. Mr. Zelensky said the failure to open corridors to all seeking escape was a tragedy compounded by Ukraine’s vulnerability to the barrage of missiles and aerial bombardments launched by the Russians.

“The blame for every death of every person in Ukraine from airstrikes and in blocked cities is, of course, on the Russian state, on the Russian military,” he said in his daily speech to the nation. He implored Western nations to do more to help Ukraine secure “the Ukrainian sky from Russian assassins.”

Russia’s military superiority in size and weapons, however, has not insulated the invasion force from repeated losses and setbacks. While independent corroboration of battlefield claims is difficult, it was clear that Ukraine’s defenders had flustered the speed of the Russian advance.

Since the start of the war, Ukraine’s military claims to have killed more than 12,000 Russian soldiers. Western officials said that number was high, though there had likely been several thousand Russian casualties.

In its latest daily update on Tuesday, the Ukrainian military said it had shot down or destroyed 48 Russian airplanes and 80 helicopters; captured or destroyed 303 tanks and hundreds of mechanized vehicles and cars; taken out two Russian naval vessels, including a warship; and blown up dozens of fuel tanker and mobile missile launching systems.

Satellite imagery analyzed by military analysts suggests that roughly 950 Russian vehicles, including 140 tanks, have been destroyed or damaged, according to Justin Bronk, a research fellow for air power and

technology at the Royal United Services Institute, a London research group that specializes in security issues. That represents only a fraction of the invasion force, but it is still striking.

The intelligence arm of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry said on Tuesday that Maj. Gen. Vitaly Gerasimov, chief of staff of Russia's 41st Army, had been killed outside Kharkiv, making him the second Russian general to die in the war.

The Ukrainians do not release a running tally of their own soldiers killed in action. But they often note the names of those who have died and bestow them with military honors. The Kremlin, on the other hand, has forbidden the media in Russia from calling the invasion a war — it is a “special military operation,” in Mr. Putin's words — and officially, everything is going according to plan.

Of course, Ukraine and its Western allies see the promotion of Ukrainian victories as in their interest, and they tend to play up logistical and morale problems in the Russian ranks. By what American officials described as conservative estimates, Ukrainian soldiers have killed more than 3,000 Russian troops.

These officials, citing confidential United States intelligence assessments, said that Ukraine had also shot down military transport planes carrying Russian paratroopers, downed helicopters and blown holes in Russia's convoys using American anti-tank missiles and armed drones supplied by Turkey.

Nonetheless, there is no sign that Mr. Putin will soften his approach to subjugate Ukraine, part of the Russian leader's avowed intention to strengthen Russia against what he has described as an existential threat by the West.

At a briefing in Washington for Congress on Tuesday, the top American intelligence official, Avril D. Haines, told lawmakers that she expected Mr. Putin would be “essentially doubling down” in the invasion, to force Ukraine to disarm and proclaim neutrality.

Ms. Haines, the Biden administration's director of national intelligence, said Mr. Putin “feels aggrieved the West does not give him proper deference and perceives this as a war he cannot afford to lose.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Russia oil ban could hit US economy
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/business/economy/russian-oil-ban-economy.html
GIST	<p>The ban on Russian oil imports announced by President Biden on Tuesday could have meaningful consequences for the U.S. economy, pushing prices at the gas pump higher when inflation is already rapid, although how long-lasting that impact might be remains uncertain.</p> <p>“We’re banning all imports of Russian oil and gas and energy,” Mr. Biden said, speaking at a White House briefing. He said the plan would target the “main artery” of the Russian economy. While he acknowledged that the move would likely push gas prices up, he blamed Russian aggression for that reality.</p> <p>The ban applies to imports of Russian oil, liquefied natural gas and coal. It also prohibits new U.S. investments in Russia's energy sector. And it blocks Americans from financing or enabling foreign companies that are making investments to produce energy in Russia.</p> <p>Europe imports far more of its supply from Russia than the United States, but energy markets are global, and the mere threat of a ban has pushed commodity prices higher in recent days.</p> <p>“Things have been so volatile,” said Omair Sharif, founder of Inflation Insights, noting that it was difficult to tell how much of the rise in oil prices in recent days traces back to this specific ban. But the conflict in Ukraine is clearly pushing commodity gas prices higher — so much so that the national average gas price could rise to nearly \$4.50 this month, he said, “assuming we don’t move any more.”</p>

While the oil and gas ban is almost sure to push inflation higher in the United States, economists have said that the scale of the economic consequences would depend in large part on how it was structured. For instance, it would likely make a big difference globally and in markets if Europeans also ban Russian oil and gas imports, and it is not yet clear whether or to what extent that will happen.

A ban across many countries “would severely reduce and disrupt energy supply on a global scale and already high commodity prices would rise,” Caroline Bain, an economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a research note ahead of the announcement, estimating that the price of the global oil benchmark, Brent crude, would settle in at about \$160 per barrel in that case.

The Brent [crude price jumped](#) by about 6 percent to roughly \$130 per barrel by the middle of the day Tuesday. By comparison, it was about \$78 per barrel at the end of 2021.

It is not yet clear how many countries will adopt a similar ban: The White House [signaled this week](#) that the United States could act separately in blocking imports of Russian oil, noting that countries in Europe are more reliant on Russian energy, something Mr. Biden also alluded to on Tuesday.

“Many of our European allies and partners may not be in a position to join us,” he said, but added that allies “remain united in our purpose” to inflict pain on Russia’s war effort. That includes efforts by the European Union to [lessen its dependence](#) on Russian energy.

Britain indicated on Tuesday that it would take its own steps to ban imports of Russian energy products. Kwasi Kwarteng, the country’s business and energy secretary, said that it [would phase out imports of Russian oil](#) and oil products by the end of 2022.

Other European countries are under increasing pressure to follow suit.

“Everything’s on the table,” Franck Riester, the French minister for foreign trade, told the [franceinfo radio station](#) on Monday, adding that France had to look at potential bans on oil and gas imports from Russia with regard to “consequences in terms of pressure on Russia and in terms of economic, financial and social impacts in Europe.”

The office of President Emmanuel Macron of France said on Tuesday evening that the country had to coordinate with the European Union before taking any further steps, but acknowledged Europe’s need to reduce its reliance on Russia.

“The United States is not dependent on Russian oil and gas, but the European partners are,” Mr. Macron’s office said in a statement. “We have a long-term policy of getting rid of the dependence on Russian oil and gas, but in the immediate future we need to discuss this with our European partners.”

While Italy is very dependent on Russian gas, the nation’s government has said that if the European Union decided to cut off its consumption of Russian gas and oil, Italy would not oppose the effort.

The direct U.S. economic impact from the loss of Russian oil is likely to be notable, though less severe than what would happen in Europe. According to the International Energy Agency, the United States imported less than [700,000 barrels of oil per day](#) from Russia in 2021. That represents less than 10 percent of what the United States imports globally.

Higher global oil and gas commodity prices and rising prices at the pump will add to the inflationary pain that is already dogging consumers. Prices are climbing at the fastest pace in 40 years, and data this week is expected to show that the annual increase climbed higher in February.

Rising gas prices will exacerbate that trend. The national average price hit \$4.17 on Tuesday, [according to AAA](#), a new high for regular unleaded gas.

“There will be costs as well, here in the United States,” Mr. Biden said. “Republicans and Democrats alike understand that.”

Mr. Sharif said U.S. inflation could peak at 8.3 percent in March, given the jump in gas prices. Before the conflict, he had expected it to ease down to 2.7 percent by the end of the year, but now he is expecting a rate closer to 4.5 percent.

Higher gas prices also eat into consumers’ budgets, preventing them from spending on other things — so a ban could also have consequences for overall economic growth.

But consumers are sitting on big cash piles amassed over the course of the pandemic, and because the United States produces gas domestically, higher prices could also incentivize companies to invest and supply more in the United States.

“It is risky to assume that the old rule about higher prices depress overall U.S. economic growth still applies,” Ian Shepherdson, an economist at Pantheon Economics, wrote in a recent note.

High gas prices could be a liability for Democrats during a midterm election year, given they hit voters right in the wallet. Republicans have already seized on gas prices as a talking point.

“Under Joe Biden, families are paying more for gas than ever before,” Ronna McDaniel, chairwoman of the Republican National Committee, said in a statement Tuesday.

But the White House is emphasizing that the price increases are the result of the actions of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, and Mr. Biden pointed out that the United States and its partners are releasing global [petroleum reserves](#).

The president also seemed prepared to shift some blame to companies.

“To the oil and gas companies, and to the finance firms — we understand that Putin’s war against the people of Ukraine is causing prices to rise, we get that, that’s self-evident,” he said. He added, “It’s no excuse to exercise excessive price increases, or padding profits, or any kind of effort to exploit this situation or American consumers.”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Commerce warns China firms aiding Russia
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/technology/chinese-companies-russia-semiconductors.html
GIST	<p>Gina Raimondo, the secretary of commerce, issued a stern warning Tuesday to Chinese companies that might defy U.S. restrictions against exporting to Russia, saying the United States would cut them off from American equipment and software they need to make their products.</p> <p>The Biden administration could “essentially shut” down Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation or any Chinese companies that defy U.S. sanctions by continuing to supply chips and other advanced technology to Russia, Ms. Raimondo said in an interview with The New York Times.</p> <p>The United States, the European Union and other governments have issued sweeping sanctions and export controls in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The export controls prohibit the sale of certain high-tech products, including advanced semiconductors, to Russia and Belarus.</p> <p>The U.S. export controls apply not just to American companies, but to companies anywhere in the world that use American software or technology to manufacture their products, which include many Chinese companies.</p> <p>China and Russia have strengthened their trade ties in recent years, and the Chinese government has expressed some solidarity with the Russian government despite the invasion. But China does not have the</p>

	<p>ability to make the world's most advanced semiconductors, Ms. Raimondo said, and Chinese companies that continue to supply Russia would face harsh penalties.</p> <p>Russia "is certainly going to be courting other countries to do an end run around our sanctions and export controls," Ms. Raimondo said. But if the United States were to find that a company like the Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation, in Shanghai, was selling its chips to Russia, "we could essentially shut SMIC down because we prevent them from using our equipment and our software," she said.</p> <p>"They have their own self-interest to not supply this stuff to Russia. So they're not doing it out of the goodness of their heart. It would be devastating to China's ability to produce these chips," Ms. Raimondo added.</p> <p>The new export controls, which were issued in coordination with the European Union, Australia, Japan, South Korea and other allies, are designed to stem the flow of advanced technologies to Russia to degrade the Russian military and certain strategic sectors that help President Vladimir V. Putin maintain control of Russia.</p> <p>The United States took similar action against the Chinese telecom firm Huawei in 2020, cutting it off from global supplies of chips and other electronics made with U.S. technology. The measure ended up crippling Huawei's successful mobile and broadband businesses.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Stocks fall again, energy prices climb
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/business/oil-prices-rise-as-trading-is-halted-in-nickel-after-price-surge.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout link back to briefing
GIST	<p>Stocks on Wall Street fell again and oil and gas prices surged on Tuesday as Western governments advanced efforts to isolate Russia by taking steps to cut it off from global oil markets.</p> <p>In the United States, President Biden announced a ban on the importation of Russian oil and natural gas, a move that could increase gasoline prices that have already climbed to record highs. Britain said it would phase out imports of Russian oil by the end of the year. And the European Commission — the executive arm of the European Union, which is heavily dependent on Russian oil and gas — outlined a proposal to make itself independent of that supply in the coming years.</p> <p>Russia is one of the world's largest energy producers, and crude oil prices were sharply higher on Tuesday. Brent crude, the global benchmark, rose about 4 percent, to about \$128 a barrel, off its earlier high of about \$133. West Texas Intermediate futures climbed to around \$124 a barrel.</p> <p>Since Russia invaded Ukraine on Feb. 24, oil prices have risen about 30 percent amid concerns about the global supply of fuel. Though Western governments announced a number of severe penalties on Russia immediately after the invasion, oil trading was not included in those measures.</p> <p>Stocks have tumbled as well, with the spike in oil prices raising threatening to exacerbate inflationary pressures and possibly leading to a slowdown in economic growth. Gas prices have followed crude oil higher, hitting a national average of \$4.17 a gallon on Tuesday, according to AAA, a new high for regular unleaded gas.</p> <p>With consumer prices already climbing at their fastest pace in 40 years, higher gas prices could hamper spending that is critical to the American economy.</p> <p>"Higher prices at the pump means less spending on other consumer goods," said Beth Ann Bovino, the chief U.S. economist at S&P Global. "It crimps into purchasing power, forcing people to trade down, foregoing expensive steak for cheaper options."</p>

On Monday, the S&P 500 suffered its worst one-day decline in more than a year — falling 3 percent — as oil prices began to climb in anticipation of the import ban by the United States. The index extended its losses on Tuesday, dropping 0.7 percent. The index is down 12.5 percent this year.

Benchmarks in Europe were mostly lower, with the Stoxx Europe 600 slipping 0.5 percent, its fourth consecutive day of losses.

Before the invasion of Ukraine, investors were already contending with uncertainty over the effects of the Federal Reserve's plan to raise interest rates as it tries to slow inflation. The Fed has signaled that the conflict is unlikely to deter it from raising interest rates this month.

In addition to energy, Russia is a big producer of staples like wheat, aluminum and palladium, which is used in cars and phones — and prices of those commodities have been soaring. On Tuesday, the [London Metal Exchange](#) suspended trading in its market for nickel, another big Russian export and a key component in batteries for electric vehicles and stainless steel, after the three-month price briefly soared above \$100,000 per metric ton, more than double the previous day's price.

The exchange said it was considering a “multiday closure” of the nickel market, “given the geopolitical situation which underlies recent price moves.” Monday's closing price of \$48,078 was itself 66 percent higher than Friday's.

On Tuesday, nickel last traded at \$80,000 but the London Metal Exchange canceled all trades from the morning before the trading suspension.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 EU seeks independence from Russia oil
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/business/european-union-russia-oil-gas.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&module=&state=default&region=footer&context=breakout_link_back_to_briefing
GIST	<p>The European Commission on Tuesday outlined ambitious proposals to “make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels well before 2030.”</p> <p>Europe has been hit with exorbitant natural gas prices in recent months because of tight supplies, exacerbated by restrictions by Russia and worries that Moscow would cut flows in response to Europe's support for Ukraine.</p> <p>“We must become independent from Russian oil, coal and gas,” the commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen, said in a news release. “We simply cannot rely on a supplier who explicitly threatens us.”</p> <p>The proposals will be discussed at a meeting of European leaders in France this week. If enacted by member countries, the measures are likely to be a huge boon for a variety of energy businesses, from the suppliers of liquefied natural gas in Qatar and around the Gulf of Mexico to builders of solar energy parks and offshore wind farms. The question is whether they can be executed rapidly enough to prevent further harm to household finances and the broader economy.</p> <p>“If we react to the current crisis with a warlike reaction,” said Marco Alverà, chief executive of Snam, the Italian natural gas company, “we can do a lot in six months.”</p> <p>Other countries are moving swiftly to cut ties with Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. On Tuesday, President Biden announced a ban on U.S. imports of Russian oil and natural gas. “This means Russian oil will no longer be acceptable to U.S. ports and the American people will deal another powerful blow to this war machine,” he said.</p>

Britain also declared on Tuesday that it would phase out imports of Russian oil by the end of the year; Russian gas supplies would not be affected.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is turning into a watershed moment for Europe on energy matters. Europe has long relied on Russia for a large portion of its oil and gas, trusting in what many European leaders thought was a mutually beneficial business relationship.

In recent months, though, Russia has appeared to exacerbate an already tight natural gas market by declining to provide Europe with any gas above contracted amount. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine last month, European gas prices have risen to astronomical levels, comparable to more than \$500 a barrel for oil. High gas prices have also sent electricity prices much higher, putting pressure on both consumers and businesses.

Clearly, recent weeks have shaken Ms. von der Leyen and her colleagues into action. The proposals announced on Tuesday are a mixture of short-term measures intended to avoid repeating the debacle of recent months in energy markets next year as well as medium-term proposals to accelerate the installation of equipment to generate enormous amounts of clean energy like wind and solar power.

One goal is to cut natural gas imports from Russia by two-thirds this year, while hugely expanding renewable energy, said Frans Timmermans, the commission's executive vice president for green energy, during a news conference at European Union headquarters in Brussels.

"Instead of continuing to fund fossil-fuel imports and fund Russian oligarchs, renewables create new jobs here in Europe," he said.

Mr. Timmermans declined to answer a question on whether the European Union would follow the United States in banning imports of Russian oil. "I think we should wait with our comments until we have heard the announcement," he said.

Perhaps the most crucial of the proposals aims to fill natural gas storage facilities to 90 percent of their capacity. The idea is to create a buffer against cold weather that eats up gas supplies, and to prevent blackmail by suppliers like Russia.

The magnitude of the task that these proposals are trying to tackle was manifest in some of the numbers the bloc released on Tuesday. Some 45 percent of the European Union's gas came from Russia in 2021, while Russia was also Europe's largest supplier of oil at 27 percent, more than three times the next largest, Norway.

The European Union says it will accomplish these goals by saving energy and diversifying supplies. Officials released documents showing that substantial new supplies of liquefied natural gas could come from countries like the United States, Qatar and Egypt. The problem, though, is that Europe will need to compete with other major L.N.G. consumers like China, South Korea and Japan, and the additional demand from Europe might push prices up higher for everyone.

"It is going to be like adding another China in the market," said Henning Gloystein, a director at Eurasia Group, a political risk firm.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Venezuela releases 2 American prisoners
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/world/americas/venezuela-american-prisoner-release.html
GIST	<p>Venezuela's authoritarian government on Tuesday released at least two imprisoned Americans, a potential turning point in the Biden administration's relationship with Russia's staunchest ally in the Western Hemisphere.</p> <p>The release followed a rare trip by a high-level U.S. delegation to Venezuela over the weekend to meet with President Nicolás Maduro, part of a broader Biden administration agenda in autocratic countries</p>

that may be rethinking their ties with President Vladimir V. Putin in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The talks with Venezuela, which has enormous proven oil reserves, assumed new urgency after President Biden announced Tuesday that the United States would ban Russian oil and gas imports because of the invasion. That move is expected to further tighten the availability of crude oil on the global market, and could raise gas prices at a moment when inflation has climbed at its fastest pace in 40 years.

"This is a step that we're taking to inflict further pain on Putin, but there will be costs as well here in the United States," Mr. Biden said of the ban on Russian oil.

American officials said that the prisoner release was not part of a deal with Venezuela to restart oil sales to the United States, which were banned under the Trump administration. For weeks, American business people who have worked in Venezuela have had back-channel discussions about resuming America's oil trade with Mr. Maduro's government.

Venezuela could eventually help make up some of the shortfall caused by the ban on Russian oil. But industry experts warned that Venezuelan oil supplies would do little to tame American gas prices and inflation quickly. Increasing the country's production may take time after the years of mismanagement and underinvestment that have decimated the country's energy sector.

Prominent members of Congress have also come out against efforts to thaw relations with Mr. Maduro, whose government has been accused by the United Nations of systematic human rights violations.

"Nicolás Maduro is a cancer to our hemisphere and we should not breathe new life into his reign of torture and murder," Senator Bob Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat who leads the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Monday in a statement.

The released men are Gustavo Cárdenas, an executive at the American branch of Venezuela's state oil company who was detained in 2017, and Jorge Alberto Fernández, Mr. Biden said in a statement.

"These men are fathers who lost precious time with their children and everyone they love, and their families have suffered every day of their absence," he said, adding, "We also remember the names and the stories of every American who is being unjustly held against their will — in Venezuela, in Russia, in Afghanistan, Syria, China, Iran and elsewhere around the world."

Mr. Fernández, a Cuban American, was a tourist who was accused of terrorism for bringing a drone into Venezuela in February 2021, according to his lawyer.

At least eight other U.S. nationals remain jailed in Caracas on charges ranging from embezzlement to terrorism.

The purpose of the American officials' visit to Venezuela was to discuss "energy security" and the status of imprisoned Americans, the White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a news conference.

Mr. Maduro said he received the American delegation at the presidential palace and called the meeting "respectful, cordial, very diplomatic." The talks, he said, would continue. He also said he would restart talks with the country's opposition.

The Venezuelan government wants to resume oil sales to the United States to take advantage of high oil prices and to replace the revenues from trade channels it built through the Russian financial system that have been frozen by Western nations to punish Russian aggression against Ukraine, according to officials and oil businessmen in the country.

Selling directly to the United States would also allow Mr. Maduro to reap full profits from the highest oil prices in more than a decade, instead of selling the crude at deep discount to a network of middlemen used to bypass the U.S. ban, they said.

Before that ban, Venezuela exported most of its oil to the United States, whose Gulf refineries were built to process the country's heavy crude.

In 2017, Venezuelan security forces arrested six executives from Citgo Petroleum, the American branch of the state oil company, after the Maduro government summoned them to meetings in Caracas. The State Department has said that all six detainees are U.S. nationals.

The executives were charged with financial crimes and jailed. Their former boss, Nelson Martínez, the head of the state oil company, was detained soon after them and died in custody a year later.

The executives' families and their lawyers have said that the men, who have come to be known as the Citgo 6, are innocent and that they were lured to Caracas to be used by Mr. Maduro as pawns in his negotiations with the United States.

Venezuela's treatment of the executives varied as U.S.-Venezuelan relations warmed and cooled. Sometimes the detainees were held in prison, other times in house arrest. Since last year, they have been held in a single cell in the Venezuela's secret police's underground prison, where the United Nations has documented irregularities and human rights abuses in the case of at least one of them.

Among the other Americans held in Venezuela is Matthew Heath, a Marine veteran who was detained in Venezuela's northern state of Falcon in 2020. The Venezuelan government claims he was spying on critical infrastructure. Mr. Heath's family and the U.S. government said that he was innocent and that he was detained because of his nationality.

Two other Americans still detained, former Special Forces members Airan Berry and Luke Denman, were arrested in 2020 after they tried to invade Venezuela by boat as part of a failed plot to overthrow Mr. Maduro.

The Trump administration cut off diplomatic relations with Venezuela in 2019, closing the United States Embassy in Caracas and imposing the ban on Venezuelan oil. A year later, the Justice Department indicted Mr. Maduro and more than a dozen other Venezuelan officials on drug trafficking charges, accusing them of facilitating cocaine shipments to the United States.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Ukraine hospitals confront grim reality war
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/world/europe/ukraine-kyiv-hospitals.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — A grim scene awaited Dr. Oleksandr Sherbina as he made the rounds of Clinical Hospital No. 7, a medical facility that once specialized in treating strokes but is now suddenly immersed in the atrocities of war. As he passed the operating theater, surgeons were amputating the lower leg of a wounded Ukrainian soldier.</p> <p>The hospital is near a combat zone in a northwestern suburb of Kyiv, where the booms of incoming artillery can be heard inside the building amid a scramble of activity as triage nurses greet the ambulances arriving every few minutes. In a hallway, an orderly used a rag to wash blood off stretchers.</p> <p>“The flow of wounded is growing,” said Dr. Sherbina, a surgeon who is the hospital’s director.</p> <p>In recent days the fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces has crept from outlying towns to the edge of Kyiv, and closer to his hospital. “We work and we understand that every day it is getting worse and worse,” he added.</p>

This worries Dr. Sherbina deeply. Even as he and fellow doctors treat patients ravaged by the shrapnel that whistles off mortars and artillery shells, they know they are at risk of suffering the same type of wounds.

“This is what I am most afraid of, because we are close to the fighting,” he said. “I am hoping that the walls defend us.”

Around Ukraine, as Russian bombings have grown more indiscriminate and more civilians find themselves in harm’s way, hospitals have become increasingly perilous places to work. They have been hit by heavy artillery, and doctors and nurses have been killed while performing their duties. The Ukrainian Ministry of Health reported that 34 medical facilities had been damaged and that at least 10 doctors had been killed.

Ambulance workers have also been killed. The ministry said seven ambulances had been fired on, killing four emergency medical technicians in separate incidents, and that another two emergency medical technicians were killed while traveling in civilian cars to treat the wounded.

The ministry’s reports could not be independently confirmed.

The most dire conditions are not in Kyiv, the capital, but in cities partially or wholly surrounded, such as Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine, where three medical facilities have been damaged by artillery: the Kharkiv City Hospital, the Regional Children’s Hospital and a blood bank.

A surgeon working in the military hospital in Kharkiv, who said military rules prohibited her from speaking publicly, described a flood of civilian and military casualties. The hospital, she said, receives 60 to 80 wounded people per day.

“It comes in waves,” she said in a telephone interview. Typically, she said, “the first half a day can be calm and then a huge wave of wounded arrive” later in the day, following the rhythm of the fighting, which tends to take place in the afternoon.

Yevheniy Ilin, a surgical oncologist, was working in the city’s oncology hospital on Feb. 28 when a bomb landed nearby, blowing in all the windows on one side of the building, he said in a telephone interview. The heat and electricity went out in the hospital, he said, so he moved to the city’s military hospital. Many other doctors gave up working in the city and joined the flow of displaced people headed west.

“We are coping,” he said. “You just go and sleep any free moment you have. Whether it is 15 or 30 minutes. You never know when the next shelling will be and if you’ll get to sleep at night.”

The World Health Organization on Tuesday said it had confirmed attacks on medical facilities in Ukraine and said it was investigating reports of more attacks, but the group had a different total than the Ukrainian Ministry of Health. The W.H.O. said it had confirmed 16 attacks on hospitals, in which nine people were killed and 16 wounded, Catherine Smallwood, senior emergency officer for W.H.O. Europe, told a news conference.

The group noted that there had been direct attacks on hospitals and that combatants had at times appropriated ambulances or diverted them for nonmedical uses. The number of attacks had increased rapidly in recent days, she said.

The W.H.O. said it had dispatched 76 tons of emergency medical supplies to Ukraine but that some life-saving items, such as oxygen, insulin and surgical supplies, were in short supply because of the war’s disruptions.

The dwindling supply of oxygen is particularly worrisome, said Dr. Hans Kluge, the W.H.O.’s Europe director. He noted that deaths from Covid-19 in Ukraine, where only about 30 percent of people over 60 are vaccinated, are likely to rise because of oxygen shortages.

Dr. Sherbina's hospital in Kyiv is now nearly wholly focused on treating those wounded in the fighting. The doctors and nurses have been living in the hospital's basement since the war began on Feb. 24. They have also set up two backup emergency rooms in the basement and placed cots so they can move patients underground if needed. They have a generator and diesel fuel that will last several days.

Yaroslav Linko, an orthopedic surgeon, said the onslaught of patients began about five days ago, when the Russian army began pushing through outlying towns toward Kyiv. Soon, the wounded started showing up in droves.

"When the young nurses see the wounded soldiers, they cry," said Dr. Pavel Oblap, an anesthesiologist.

Dr. Oblap, a strapping man in scrubs with buzz-cut gray hair, had once treated firefighters for radiation exposure during the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. "It's exactly the same feeling of catastrophe and sense of alarm," he said. "But I've been working in emergency rooms for 40 years. I'm prepared."

He said many doctors had left Kyiv as the war started, including some who worried for their children and evacuated to Ukraine's western regions or left the country. "Only those who are not afraid remained," he said.

Dr. Oblap was tending to a soldier coming out of surgery for a deep laceration on his left hand. The soldier was lying on a stretcher, groggy and mumbling.

At one point, the soldier, who seemed unable to explain how he had been wounded, tried to stand up and pulled on a drip line in agitation.

Once Dr. Oblap coaxed him back onto the stretcher, the soldier, who offered only his first name, Dmytro, said he wanted to tell a joke. "Putin died and went to hell, but there was a bar in hell," Dmytro began, referring to Russian President Vladimir V. Putin. But then his head tipped back on the stretcher and he passed out before getting to the punchline.

Talk of the war, and the potential fate of Kyiv, was pervasive. Dr. Oblap said he didn't expect the Russians to try to capture the capital in street fighting. It would be too costly for their army, he said.

But another doctor standing nearby, Vladimir Novikov, an orthopedist, disagreed. "They will do it and they don't care," he said.

Outside, flurries of wet snow blew through Kyiv, blanketing the streets and covering the hoods and hats of people standing in long lines for grocery stores. At Clinical Hospital No. 7, as more ambulances arrived, Dr. Sherbina said he is ready to keep working even if the fighting moves into the nearby streets.

"We will do the maximum," he said. "As much as is needed, we will do."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 US officials: Putin 'unlikely to be deterred'
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/us/politics/us-intelligence-russia-ukraine.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Top U.S. intelligence officials said on Tuesday that President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had been surprised and unsettled by the problems that have hampered his military in Ukraine, issues that will make it more difficult for Russian forces to control the country.</p> <p>But Mr. Putin is determined to succeed in Ukraine, and will try to double down and use ever more brutal tactics, the officials said during an appearance before the House Intelligence Committee.</p> <p>America's intelligence agencies, which before the attack released information on Russia's troop buildup and war plans, will work to highlight Russian atrocities and crimes, a continuation of the information war that helped rally the West to impose tough sanctions on Ukraine, the officials said.</p>

Before the invasion, Mr. Putin thought the war would be relatively quick, allowing him to rapidly seize Kyiv and overwhelm Ukrainian forces, Avril D. Haines, the director of national intelligence, told lawmakers.

“Moscow underestimated the strength of Ukraine’s resistance and the degree of internal military challenges we are observing, which include an ill-constructed plan, morale issues and considerable logistical issues,” Ms. Haines said.

Controlling all of Ukraine will necessitate even more forces than Russia has committed to the fight, she said.

Some allied intelligence services believe that Mr. Putin’s early military problems could cause him to readjust his plans to take control of the whole country, and stop his advance after he captures Kyiv, particularly if military officers highlight how many additional forces it will require to secure Ukraine.

But diplomats are also quick to add that they are not sure how rationally Mr. Putin is viewing the situation. At the hearing, Ms. Haines said Mr. Putin appeared intent on intensifying his campaign, despite his military’s logistical problems.

“Our analysts assess that Putin is unlikely to be deterred by such setbacks,” Ms. Haines said, “and instead may escalate, essentially doubling down to achieve Ukrainian disarmament, neutrality, to prevent it from further integrating with the U.S. and NATO.”

Given the problems the Russian military has faced, and the rising will of Ukraine to fight, intelligence officials predicted the war would intensify. William J. Burns, the C.I.A. director, is anticipating an “ugly next few weeks.”

“I think Putin is angry and frustrated right now,” Mr. Burns said. He is likely to “try to grind down the Ukrainian military with no regard for civilian casualties,” he added.

Lt. Gen. Scott D. Berrier, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said there was a limit to how long Kyiv could hold on as Russian forces encircled Ukraine and tightened the vise. “With supplies being cut off, it will become somewhat desperate in, I would say, 10 days to two weeks,” General Berrier said.

Other estimates are similar. Some allied governments believe Russia will finish encircling Kyiv in a week and, given the strength of Ukraine’s resistance, the city may be able to hold out for another month, a European diplomat said on Tuesday.

While the intelligence chiefs said Mr. Putin felt aggrieved, Mr. Burns said it would be incorrect to view his actions as crazy.

The Russian leader’s increasing isolation and insulation from conflicting views make him “extremely difficult to deal with,” Mr. Burns said. Without aides willing to push back, Mr. Putin entered the war misunderstanding the will of Ukraine to fight back and the West to take action.

Germany, for example, suspended the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which would have allowed imported Russian natural gas to bypass Ukraine; sent weapons directly to Ukraine; and expanded its defense budget.

“He’s been unsettled by Western reaction and allied resolve, particularly some of the decisions that the German government has taken,” Mr. Burns said. “I think he’s been unsettled by the performance of his own military.”

General Berrier said he had low confidence in reports of Russian casualties, but put Moscow’s losses at 2,000 to 4,000.

Mr. Burns said the American government was keeping a close eye on Mr. Putin's domestic support. With state-controlled media dominating what the Russian public hears and independent reporting on the invasion essentially being made illegal, it will take time for Russians to "absorb the consequences" of Mr. Putin's actions.

But, over time, funerals of Russian soldiers killed in Ukraine will have an impact, Mr. Burns said.

"You also see, in relatively small numbers, a lot of very courageous Russians out on the street protesting," Mr. Burns said. "Something like 13 or 14,000 have been arrested since then, which is not a small thing in a deeply repressive society like Russia."

Other governments said another crucial factor is whether Mr. Putin's support within the military erodes. Before the invasion, Russian officers complained about the plan, according to intercepts obtained by Western intelligence. The discontent with the Kremlin's planning now continues, the European diplomat said.

The intelligence community will expand its information war with Russia, working to expose Moscow's war crimes and atrocities in Ukraine, Ms. Haines said. American spy agencies were working with other agencies to document Russian actions in Ukraine, including war crimes, and to hold the perpetrators accountable.

"Russian forces are at the very least operating with reckless disregard for the safety of noncombatants, as Russian units launch artillery and airstrikes into urban areas as they have done in cities across Ukraine," Ms. Haines said.

Such an information campaign to expose Russia's attacks on civilians and other missteps would build on the intelligence released before the invasion, which sought to expose Russia's war plans, rally allied support for tough financial sanctions and deny Moscow the chance to create a false pretext for an attack.

Gen. Paul M. Nakasone, the director of the National Security Agency, said that the United States had closely tracked three or four Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine, and that reinforced Ukrainian defenses had helped blunt wider Russian cyberattacks.

"In terms of why they haven't done more, I think that's obviously some of the work that the Ukrainians have done, some of the challenges that the Russians have encountered and some of the work that others have been able to do to prevent their actions," General Nakasone said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Starbucks suspends all business in Russia
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/starbucks-suspends-all-business-russia/VHAXMEMIEFBFHGIBMGUDWWO7DM/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Starbucks is suspending all business activity in Russia in response to Vladimir Putin's continued aggression in Ukraine, according to CEO Kevin Johnson.</p> <p>Starbucks only has about 130 locations in Russia and Ukraine, according to Bank of America Securities. They are all licensed locations, owned and operated by a partner company.</p> <p>The estimated loss for those locations is estimated to be less than 1% of Starbucks' global revenue.</p> <p>Johnson also said Starbucks will provide support to the nearly 2,000 partners in Russia that depend on Starbucks for their livelihood.</p> <p>He did not specify what that entailed.</p>

	<p>In the company's hometown of Seattle, people welcomed the announcement.</p> <p>"Good idea, 100 percent, I think that's great," said Dustin Grantham as he passed by a downtown store. "I think you really need to put your money where your mouth is," said Laura Guirau, who was visiting Seattle from North Carolina.</p> <p>Before the announcement, Starbucks faced growing calls for a boycott.</p> <p>Earlier Tuesday, McDonald's announced it would temporarily close its 847 restaurants in Russia, as did the parent company of KFC and Taco Bell.</p> <p>Coca-Cola and Pepsi also announced pullbacks.</p> <p>"Pressure has been building for days now, and as more and more companies make this decision, it becomes harder for the remaining companies not to follow suit," said Jeff Shulman, professor of marketing at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business.</p> <p>A Yale professor is updating an influential list of how U.S. companies are responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Amazon, Microsoft and Boeing are among those listed as curtailing their Russian operations.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Seattle outdoor dining program thru 2023
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/seattle-extends-outdoor-dining-program-through-2023/LO4VL5QVDJAD3CGTIUOKDBCTIQ/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Outdoor dining is sticking around a while longer in Seattle as the city is extending its free outdoor dining permit program through Jan. 31, 2023.</p> <p>Mayor Bruce Harrell signed legislation Tuesday to extend the Safe Start Program, which simplifies the process of applying for the permits and waives application fees.</p> <p>Safe Start permits were originally set to expire May 31, 2022.</p> <p>"Last year between supply chain, labor and the cost of lumber, it really wasn't feasible for us," said Charli Anthe, the co-owner of Moshi Moshi Sushi & Izakaya in Ballard. "But we are looking at being able to do it for the upcoming season, which we're really excited about."</p> <p>Councilmember Dan Strauss, who sponsored the legislation, says the extension is part of a "pathway to permanence" for outdoor dining and will give the Seattle Department of Transportation time to come up with a permanent plan.</p> <p>"The permits will cost money and there will be design regulations and size regulations, etc. and we want to make sure we are setting up small businesses to succeed with their entrepreneurial spirit," said Strauss.</p> <p>SDOT expects to have a draft proposal of a permanent plan by this spring.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Tacoma clears camp; no one accepted help
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/city-of-tacoma-seeks-property-owners-to-create-low-barrier-shelters-to-house-homeless

GIST	<p>The city of Tacoma started clearing out a large homeless camp Tuesday in an effort to get the homeless off the streets and into shelters. Neighbors and nearby businesses said the camp is known for drug use and other problems, and are worried it's only getting pushed to another block.</p> <p>"It's unpleasant to see this state of decay in our city and it's unpleasant that you can't walk safely without being in fear of them being a little rowdy," neighbor Christopher Oleson stated.</p> <p>He claims campers off S 2nd St & Tacoma Ave S have left drug needles and fires in the street, and as of Tuesday night, part of the camp is still there.</p> <p>On Tuesday, he and many other neighbors watched as city crews started clearing the encampment of furniture, shopping carts full of clothes, children's toys, and a lot more.</p> <p>But, the city says four of the six campers stayed, and none of them accepted help, like shelter or other services.</p> <p>"We can continue to connect with them, continue to offer [services]," stated Allyson Griffith with Neighborhood and Community Services.</p> <p>Tacoma Police were on standby as a couple of campers walked away with their items in tow. Neighbors worry that means the problem will only keep shuffling to another block.</p> <p>"They keep popping up so I don't know. We'll see," neighbor Molly Pechacek said.</p> <p>The city currently has more than 70 available shelter beds and says it's looking to work with any property owners willing to open up a so-called "low barrier" shelter location.</p> <p>"So, an option for folks that maybe don't have as many requirements as some of our other shelters like curfew or things like that that may be limiting folks for why they might not want to go inside," Griffith explained.</p> <p>KOMO 4 asked the city how it decides which camps to tackle and when considering there are many large encampments nearby. The city said it clears out an encampment based on health and safety concerns, using metrics like the number of calls to a location.</p> <p>Crews are expected to return to that encampment on Wednesday.</p> <p>The next encampment cleanup is happening in two weeks on J Street from 7th to 13th, near the city of Tacoma Housing Authority building. The city said that area needs to clear out because of an upcoming city utility project.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Expensive airfare on way; jet fuel price rise
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/expensive-airfare-on-the-way-as-oil-supply-disruptions-drive-up-price-of-jet-fueloil-imports-russia-ukraine-travel-money-cost-putin-biden-aviation-analyst
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (TND) — Now that President Joe Biden has issued a ban on Russian oil imports, experts are warning that rising fuel prices will hit consumers far beyond the gas pump. They say travelers should brace for rising airfare this spring and summer travel season.</p> <p>According to one aviation analyst, airfare could go up at least 10-15% starting in about three or four months, just as travel is getting back to normal and airlines claw out of a two-year pandemic slump.</p> <p>"This is a torpedo, no question," analyst Mike Boyd said.</p>

If you're eyeing a ticket, now might be the best time to buy. Right now, the average roundtrip domestic flight will cost about \$305, 4% below the average price from 2019, according to the travel search engine [Hopper](#).

But global oil supply disruptions and Russia's invasion of Ukraine are driving jet fuel prices to the highest level in more than 13 years.

"We're looking at some severe route cutbacks," Boyd said.

Boyd had predicted 900 million Americans would board a plane in 2022. Now, he says, the fuel price fallout will result in a drop of 100 million passengers this year.

"Leisure travel is now going to be in the crosshairs because it's going to get more expensive to get down to Lauderdale or get to Las Vegas," said Boyd. "Plus, at \$4 a gallon to fill up with unleaded, that means I got to worry about putting bacon on the table rather than taking the family on a trip to Montana."

[Bloomberg reports](#) that in response, both Alaska Air and Allegiant Airlines will trim flights between 5-10%.

Before ticket prices go up, Boyd warns customers will first see services slashed in smaller cities.

"They're looking ahead and saying maybe the folks in Concord, North Carolina aren't going to have the money. Maybe the folks in Missoula aren't going to have the money. So they're going to pull back on that," he said.

Airlines are limited in how much they can raise fares and scale back capacity. So far, major airlines like United, Delta and American have not publicly stated any response to rising fuel prices.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Report: Russia has most sanctions in world
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/russia-now-has-the-most-sanctions-of-any-country-in-the-world-database-shows
GIST	<p>Following the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine, Russia has now become the world's most sanctioned country.</p> <p>That's according to a report from Castellum.ai, a global sanctions-tracking database. Russia has now become the target of nearly 3,000 new sanctions after dozens of nations condemned President Vladimir Putin's attempts to overthrow the Ukrainian government.</p> <p>With the combination of sanctions against Russia that had already been put in place before the invasion as well as the latest penalties, Russia has racked up a historic 5,532 sanctions.</p> <p>Russian sanctions even surpassed Iran who faces over 3,600 sanctions mostly for its continued efforts to manufacture a nuclear program as well as its financial support of well-known terrorist organizations.</p> <p>The United States and its allies have retaliated against Russia with a series of financial penalties, reflecting a massive change in how conflicts can be waged in a world that is globalized, digital and highly dependent on accessing money electronically.</p> <p>There have been economic targets in the past that depended on military maneuvers such as factory bombings, blockades and the capture of strategic resources. But the waves of sanctions unleashed over the past several weeks have demonstrated how financial markets can respond faster than setting up conventional weapons.</p>

The sanctions also are a substitute for direct military action against Russia by the U.S. and its allies. President Joe Biden has repeatedly said there will be [no U.S. troops on the ground](#), even as weapons and materials are provided to Ukraine.

The impact of the sanctions likely depends on the pace of the fighting and whether Russia takes Ukraine or finds itself in a slog in which the pain of any sanctions becomes more acute over time. But the value of the ruble has fallen about 35% since Friday, according to the financial data firm FactSet. The sharp decline of the currency has triggered higher inflation, higher interest rates and shortages of goods that hurt regular people in Russia.

So far, the U.S. and international partners have gone after Russia's largest banks, its central bank and finance ministry, and moved to block certain financial institutions from the SWIFT messaging system for international payments.

But the rules issued by the U.S. Treasury Department allow Russian energy transactions to keep going through non-sanctioned banks that are not based in the U.S. in an effort to minimize any disruptions to the global energy markets.

Meanwhile, inflation, at a 40-year peak and fueled in large part by gas prices, has hurt Biden politically with voters heading into the November elections.

On Tuesday, Biden decided to ban [Russian](#) oil imports, toughening the toll on Russia's economy in retaliation for its invasion of Ukraine, according to a person familiar with the matter.

"We're banning all imports of Russian oil and gas and energy. That means Russian oil will no longer be accepted at U.S. ports," the president announced at a press briefing.

Biden had explained his reluctance to impose energy sanctions at the outset of the conflict two weeks ago saying that he was trying "to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump."

Before the invasion, Russian oil and gas made up more than a third of government revenues. Global energy prices have surged after the invasion and have continued to rise despite coordinated releases of strategic reserves, making Russian exports even more lucrative.

The sanctions created a possible trade-off for Biden between his political interests at home and abroad. By invading Ukraine, Russia has potentially fed into the supply chain problems and inflation that have been a crucial weakness for Biden, who now is trying to strike a balance between penalizing Putin and sparing American voters.

Biden specifically highlighted the Russian energy carve-outs as a virtue because they would help to protect U.S. families and businesses from higher prices.

"Our sanctions package we specifically designed to allow energy payments to continue," he said. Restricting the world's largest exporter of natural gas and second-largest exporter of oil, after Saudi Arabia, could hurt the unity that U.S. officials say is key to confronting Putin.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Seattle longest running camp must relocate
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/seattles-longest-running-sanctioned-homeless-camp-must-move-but-has-no-place-to-go
GIST	SEATTLE - Seattle's only ‘sanctioned’ homeless encampment has to move, and it has no place to go. The move comes at a time when Mayor Bruce Harrell is changing how the city handles the homelessness crisis and the call to expand the number of sanctioned encampments by at least one city council member.

The camp in question is [Tent City 3](#), located on the front lawn of the Phinney Ridge Lutheran Church at 7500 Greenwood Avenue. The camp has moved dozens of times in its 20-year existence by design.

"The way it works with Tent City 3 is we move," said Jesara Schroeder, a 10-month resident and the camp's bookkeeper. "If we stay in one place too long, it becomes a burden at whatever location we are at."

The church has hosted the camp four other times, but the stays are limited. The current stay expires April 2 and can't be extended, a church spokesperson said.

"In the past, the camp was [limited to 90 days at one location](#), so that is what defined the length of their stays," said the church's Deacon of Outreach, Patrick Meagher.

"The camp and residents have been nothing but wonderful during their time with us," said Meagher. "While our neighborhood has been overwhelmingly supportive of us hosting TC3, there are a few neighbors and businesses who push back."

Share/Wheel, which operates the camp, has relied on invites from churches and private landowners as hosts. Schroeder says there have not been any invites so far.

"We've been sending out letters looking for places to go after this," said Schroeder.

One of those letters has gone to [Seattle Councilmember Andrew Lewis](#), who chairs the council's committee on homelessness.

Lewis has floated the idea of [expanding the number of city-sanctioned encampments to 10](#). We reached out to Lewis and his office about Tent City 3's situation and have not received a response.

A spokesperson for Harrell says his deputy mayor for homelessness, Tiffany Washington, is "open to hearing recommendations from Tent City 3 leadership on potential permanent locations."

Harrell has asked for patience for his staff to implement his homelessness plan. Those details have not been unveiled.

By some accounts, the camp has been a good neighbor. When someone broke into the Sip and Ship directly across the street, two people from the camp prevented any theft.

"They heard the glass break and they ran over and chased the individual out of the shop," said Diana Naramore, owner of Sip and Ship. "And now they are beloved by us and our team because they came over and help save my business."

When the camp does get an invite, it moves to publicly-owned land as it did in the summer of 2019 when it moved to a grass field near the Ravenna Park and Ride lot. Many in the neighborhood voiced their displeasure at the move.

The camp has always relied on donations to survive. In 2021, the Seattle City Council appropriated \$80,000 to support the camp, said Schroeder. She says the camp is expected to receive another \$80,000 from the city this year.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Hawaii last state to drop mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/hawaii-to-be-the-last-us-state-to-drop-its-mask-mandate-by-this-month
GIST	HONOLULU (AP) - The last statewide mask mandate in the U.S. will be lifted by March 26, Hawaii Gov. David Ige announced Tuesday.

No states will require masks indoors after 11:59 p.m. March 25. Hawaii is the last to drop the pandemic safety measure, with indoor mask mandates in Oregon and Washington state expiring at 11:59 p.m. Friday.

Ige said Hawaii's COVID-19 case counts and hospitalizations are decreasing. The seven-day new case average is about 140, he said, while a week ago it was more than 300. There were 48 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 on Tuesday. He said that's the first time the number has been under 50 since around last summer.

He said he expects the downward trends to continue.

Since April 2020, the state of Hawaii has required face masks. At first, it was both indoors and outdoors.

Ige, a Democrat, said Hawaii's culture of caring for others, especially kupuna, or older people in Hawaiian, helped the state tolerate the mask rule for so long.

"I do believe that we are the last community to release the mask mandate because we care about each other and we care about our community and we are all willing to sacrifice to keep each other healthy and safe," he said.

Hawaii health officials still recommend wearing masks indoors at schools, hospitals, prisons and other "congregate living settings."

Sen. Kurt Fevella, the lone Republican in the state Senate, said he gives credit to the governor for not lifting the mandate sooner, even though he knows many of his constituents are ready to take their masks off.

"People would come up to me and tell me to take the diaper off my face," Fevella said. "People being rude and disrespectful ... doesn't help anybody."

When people make those kinds of comments, he explains that he wears a mask to protect his 83-year-old father who lives with him.

He said when the mandate ends, he and his family members will continue wearing masks depending on the circumstances.

"If we don't know the crowd we're with, we'll wear the mask," he said.

The end of the mask mandate coincides with when Hawaii plans to lift its COVID-19 quarantine requirement for travelers. Starting March 26 those arriving from other places in the U.S. won't have to show proof of vaccination or a negative test to avoid sequestering themselves for five days.

Ige said these rules have contributed to Hawaii having among the lowest rates of COVID-19 in the country.

Bronx, New York, resident Pamela Aquino said her Hawaii summer vacation wasn't hindered by wearing a mask indoors.

"It was so strict there. Pretty much everywhere we went we had to wear masks," she said. "It makes sense for them. It's an island. I totally get it. You don't have a lot of hospitals."

Kauai resident Sheila Herr said she will continue wearing a mask when indoors around people, like at the grocery store, even if it's not mandatory.

"The majority of my friends on Kauai agree that we should wear masks to protect each other," she said.

State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Kemble said many people will keep masks on.

	<p>"Some will do it out of an abundance of caution. Others because they are at risk," she said. "So please encourage those who feel more comfortable wearing masks to continue to do so."</p> <p>Lt. Gov. Josh Green, an emergency room physician on the Big Island, said he recommended Monday that the governor and health department lift the mandate on or before March 25.</p> <p>"The governor and the director of health are very conservative and it has benefited us because we've got the lowest case rate and the second lowest mortality rate in the country," Green said.</p> <p>But he said he's now worried about the "collateral" effects of pandemic restrictions such as depression and alcohol abuse.</p> <p>"It's important that we begin to move toward normal because there are other considerations like people's mental health," he said.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Administration bans imports of Russian oil
SOURCE	https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/08/us-expected-to-announce-ban-on-russian-oil-as-soon-as-today-nbc-news-reports.html
GIST	<p>President Joe Biden on Tuesday announced that the U.S. will ban imports of Russian oil, a major escalation in the international response to Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>The move came as Western-allied nations work to sever Moscow from the global economy to punish Russian President Vladimir Putin for his unprovoked aggression.</p> <p>"Today I am announcing the United States is targeting the main artery of Russia's economy. We're banning all imports of Russian oil and gas and energy," Biden said at the White House. "That means Russian oil will no longer be acceptable at U.S. ports and the American people will deal another powerful blow to Putin's war machine."</p> <p>"This is a step we're taking to inflict further pain on Putin," Biden said.</p> <p>The United Kingdom announced its own restrictions on buying Russian oil imports just before Biden spoke, saying it will phase out the country's imports by the end of the year. The European Union earlier Tuesday morning unveiled a plan to wean itself off of Russian fossil fuels.</p> <p>"We simply cannot rely on a supplier who explicitly threatens us," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said in a press release announcing the plan.</p> <p>The U.S. imported about 672,000 barrels a day from Russia in 2021, according to figures from the Energy Information Administration. That amount comprises roughly 8% of the total U.S. imports of oil and refined products.</p> <p>Most of the country's crude oil and petroleum imports come from Canada, Mexico and Saudi Arabia, making the U.S. far less dependent on Russian oil than many of its European partners.</p> <p>The news of the ban, confirmed to CNBC by two people familiar with the matter prior to Biden's speech, sent oil markets soaring Tuesday morning.</p> <p>The price on West Texas Intermediate crude futures, contracts for April oil deliveries, hit \$129.44 a barrel. That level is just below a recent high of \$130.50 a barrel hit on March 7, which at the time was the highest price on oil futures since 2008.</p>

	<p>Putin's actions have provoked an unprecedented international reaction, as dozens of countries slap crippling sanctions on the Kremlin, its ultra-rich oligarchs and even Putin himself. Russia's currency has plummeted in value and its stock market has closed, while a growing list of companies have pulled their business out of the country.</p> <p>That includes businesses such as Shell, which vowed to immediately stop all purchases of Russian crude and shutter its service stations in the country.</p> <p>In the U.S., Biden has faced calls to target Russian oil, the nation's main export. But with gas prices soaring on fears of supply shortages stemming from Russia's war, the U.S. president has so far resisted those calls.</p> <p>U.S. gas prices touched all-time highs following news of the ban on Russian oil imports. The national average for a gallon of regular gas rose to a record \$4.173 on Tuesday, according to AAA. The prior record was \$4.114 from July 2008, not adjusted for inflation.</p> <p>In Tuesday's speech, Biden acknowledged that the new ban will make prices worse. "With this action, it's going to go up further," he said, warning companies against exploiting the situation by hiking prices.</p> <p>"Russia's aggression has cost us all, and it's no time for profiteering or price gouging," the president said.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/07 Tornado warnings delayed; system glitch
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/07/weather/deadly-tornado-warning-delay-wxn/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)In this day and age, most of us no longer listen for a tornado siren, instead we listen for the screeching noise or buzz of our cellphones when a tornado nears.</p> <p>Even as meteorologists we rely on apps and notifications to warn us when danger strikes.</p> <p>Unfortunately, this weekend, those notifications were delayed.</p> <p>As deadly tornadoes were carving a path through the state of Iowa on Saturday, the residents in harm's way had no idea their warnings were delayed.</p> <p>The National Weather Service's (NWS) warning system was having technical issues getting warnings to the public, so the NWS office in Des Moines had to scramble to warn the public there were tornadoes.</p> <p>Deadly tornadoes, glitch in warning system</p> <p>The severe outbreak was in some ways unusual for the Des Moines area. It is a state which typically gets tornadoes, but ones rated as high as an EF-4 in March is the unusual part.</p> <p>"We've only had in state history, I believe one EF-4 tornado in March and two or three EF-3s," noted Jim Lee, meteorologist for the NWS office in Des Moines. "So it has happened before. But it's unusual to have them that strong this early."</p> <p>As of right now, the region has preliminary reports of six tornadoes across the state of Iowa.</p> <p>The number could go up as meteorologists go out and site survey the damage.</p> <p>One of the tornadoes is believed to be an EF-0, two of them are believed to be EF-1s, two EF-2s and the fifth a possible EF-3. The sixth tornado was an EF-4 that traveled 69.5 miles and was at times 800 yards wide according to the NWS.</p> <p>In total, there were around 40 reports of tornadoes on Saturday, mostly across Iowa.</p>

All of this was happening while the NWS experienced a technology glitch, impacting its warning system, causing, at times, nearly a 10-minute delay for some warnings to get out.

"Any delays with the receipt of tornado warnings is serious business as seconds count with a fast moving and violent tornado," said Daryl Herzmann, a systems analyst with Iowa State University.

He was watching what was happening in real time and was actively tweeting about the ordeal.

"When the local NWS office issues a tornado warning, that warning text needs to travel over a network to a central clearinghouse within the NWS at DC/College Park, MD to then be disseminated to the world," Herzmann explained in an email to CNN. "This network transmission to the central clearinghouse was suffering from that 3-10 minute latency due to a misconfiguration of a network path, impacting nearly all NWS forecast offices."

He was able to detect the differences by comparing the time stamps in the NWS text and when the product was actually received on his processing software.

According to a statement from the National Weather Service, the Des Moines forecast office was aware of the delay and took the precaution to issue warnings earlier than they normally would have under similar circumstances to compensate and ensure that warnings reached the public in a timely manner.

With their main source for alerts falling short, they had to make up for it with any and every other type of communication.

"We utilized like our hotline systems to send out the warnings, phone calls and webinars with partners. We always engage the public on social media. We have real-time chat to talk to media," Lee pointed out. "We have experts and backup systems so that we can make sure that we get the best quality warnings out."

The NWS noted that NOAA Weather Radio and the Emergency Alert System were activated and broadcast the warnings immediately, with no delay.

They were still able to give around an average 20-minute lead time for people to get to safety, which is impressive.

"I can confirm that warning lead time averaged 20 minutes and some of the warnings were delayed in dissemination," Susan Buchanan, the Weather Service's director of public affairs, told CNN on Monday morning.

Most broadcast meteorologists use the instant-messenger type website to get warnings first hand from the NWS offices, then relay them to the public.

But people solely relying on their cellphones to alert them, were late getting the message because of the NWS network latency, including the EF-4 wedge tornado heading straight for the town of Winterset.

"Yes, these delays affected warnings for the Madison County tornado(es)," said Herzmann. "I don't know though if there is a case of somebody not taking action because they did not get a delayed warning."

According to an NWS update Monday afternoon: "The communications delay stemmed from a damaged fiber optic cable that serves our Dallas-Ft. Worth forecast office. The cable outage caused that office to switch from its primary, land-based communication network to a backup satellite-based network that serves every NWS field office. The uptick in messages flowing to the central message handler from NWS Central Region offices due to the severe weather, combined with the performance characteristics of the satellite network in use at a co-located site, slowed down the queue of message transmissions and created a brief backlog across multiple offices.

	<p>"NWS systems engineers monitoring the networks worked to rapidly trace the backlog to the Dallas-Ft. Worth office and when that office was removed from the network, warnings began flowing with no delay. The office was kept offline until their primary network was repaired."</p> <p>"Our primary goal now is to immediately implement procedural changes to avoid a repeat. One short-term option under consideration would move to the use of service backup by another forecast office in this type of situation, rather than the satellite-based backup, to prevent message build ups," the statement said.</p> <p>Herzmann said the "NWS is plagued with IT-related outages and failures during high impact weather events. This particular kind of latency issue only happened once before, during Hurricane Ida."</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Seattle lifts eviction ban, landlords act
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/service-providers-see-calls-spike-as-seattle-eviction-ban-ends-heres-where-to-find-help/
GIST	<p>Trevor Rigdon has a plan for the next week: Pick up as many Instacart and DoorDash trips as he can, looking to average 10 to 12 hours of work each day.</p> <p>"I'll have to get on that ... and just work as hard as possible," Rigdon said.</p> <p>Rigdon is counting down the days because last week his landlord issued him a 14-day notice to pay the month's rent he owes or leave his Capitol Hill micro-studio. Even with an array of new city and state protections, including the right to a payment plan, the notice is a source of anxiety because it's the first step toward potential eviction.</p> <p>"I'm extremely worried, of course," Rigdon said.</p> <p>For nearly two years, Seattle's eviction moratorium helped tenants who fell behind on rent avoid eviction and drew criticism from landlords who said they were struggling to cover their own bills. Rent assistance was sometimes slow to come by, frustrating advocates on both sides.</p> <p>Last week, the moratorium expired, opening a new chapter: the return of payment-related eviction notices, new demand for financial and legal help and a test of new tenant protections meant to keep people housed.</p> <p>Because of sometimes lengthy legal processes, the scale of evictions won't be clear for some time. But the days just before and after the end of the moratorium have brought an uptick in calls for help, service providers say.</p> <p>"Everyone's in panic mode of what to do and who's going to get served" with remaining rent assistance funds, said Lauren McGowan, associate vice president of United Way of King County.</p> <p>The Housing Justice Project, which represents King County tenants facing eviction, is receiving 150 to 200 calls a day, up from 40 to 50 about six months ago, said senior managing attorney Edmund Witter. Many callers are looking for help catching up on their rent, but HJP only has the resources to help people actively facing eviction.</p> <p>The city's Renting in Seattle hotline has also seen an influx of calls. In 2021, the hotline averaged about 270 calls per month, according to data from the Department of Construction and Inspections. In January, it received 343 calls and in February the number jumped to 527. Weekly data shows call numbers rose from around 82 calls weekly during the first five weeks of the year to an average of 153 the last four weeks, starting the week Mayor Bruce Harrell announced the end of the moratorium.</p> <p>With an array of new state and city laws in effect, both landlords and tenants are unsure of their rights, said Neal Simpson, spokesperson for Solid Ground, which runs a tenant message line.</p>

“Everybody’s kind of confused about what they can and cannot do,” Simpson said. “And our message really is that renters still have rights. There are still protections in place. There are still options.”

Rent assistance running out

A key piece of the safety net for tenants like Rigdon throughout the pandemic has been hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funds for emergency rent assistance. Those funds flowed to local governments, and payments were distributed directly to landlords.

Rigdon said he lost work at the Westin downtown early in the pandemic when hotels and restaurants were hard hit by shutdown orders. The well-paid front-of-house work he depended on still hasn’t fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, he said. During the last two years, he has relied on gig work and, for a time, another restaurant job to make ends meet.

But expenses add up each month, especially for the car and phone necessary for delivery work. Rigdon fell behind on rent for months and received about \$16,000 in rent assistance last year, he said.

Without that, “I would be homeless — not a question about that one,” Rigdon said.

Tens of thousands of tenants have applied for rent assistance, but local officials will run out of funds before serving all of them.

King County has spent [\\$227 million](#) in federal funds on rent assistance since last year. About 47,400 households have applied for help, and the county no longer takes applications because it expects to run out of money before serving everyone who has applied. Officials expect 7,000 to 8,000 tenants who applied to be left without help.

For tenants who are actively facing eviction in court, the Housing Justice Project has a pool of about \$13 million in county funds for rent assistance. The vast majority of those funds are still available.

The city of Seattle alone has invested nearly \$59 million toward rental assistance using general funds and federal funding during the last two years. Payments are distributed to tenants by United Way and other community groups and through payments to nonprofit affordable housing providers, according to the Seattle Office of Housing.

But most of those funds are already spoken for before evictions resume.

“As of now, the majority of these funds have been disbursed or otherwise obligated through city partners,” said Stephanie Velasco, communication director for the Office of Housing.

The remaining funds, Velasco says, will be distributed by the end of March to Seattle households — through the King County Eviction Prevention Rental Assistance Program — that applied before Feb. 28. Now, Velasco says Seattle and other cities are looking to the state and federal government for more money

Eventually, more funds could arrive. Before the legislative session ends this week, state lawmakers are still [debating their budgets](#) in Olympia, where House Democrats have proposed spending an additional \$55 million on rent assistance. Once the state runs out of onetime COVID funds, a [new, permanent rent assistance program](#) will distribute about \$40 million each year, according to the Department of Commerce.

How evictions will work now

In Seattle, tenants will continue to have some protections, including two defenses in court, if they fell behind on rent during the pandemic.

[One](#) city law says that for the next six months, tenants can raise a [defense in court](#) if they can certify they suffered financial hardship because of the pandemic. [Another](#) says tenants can at any time raise a similar defense if they are being evicted for rent debt accrued during the civil emergency declared citywide and

for six months after the emergency. The city's emergency declaration is still in place. Landlords are required to include this information on 14-day notices.

Tenants who miss rent payments within six months of the civil emergency order (not the moratorium) ending are entitled to installment plans to repay their debt, under a [2020 council ordinance](#). Tenants who owe one month of rent or less can repay the amount in three monthly installments, while those who between one and two months of rent can pay in five installments and those who owe more than two months can pay with six monthly installments. Landlords are required to notify tenants of the installment option.

All of this means that for Seattle tenants "falling behind on bills because of financial hardship, you should be OK, at least for the time being," Witter said. "The problem that we have is I don't think a lot of people are going to access that. When we require tenants to make the affirmative step, tenants often tend to struggle with a lot of other barriers."

Tenants who don't go to court will be at more risk. Before the pandemic, [between 30% and 50%](#) of Washington tenants facing eviction defaulted, meaning they did not respond in court.

Statewide, tenants do not have those defenses in court, but have some other protections. For evictions because of rent owed during the pandemic, landlords [must offer](#) tenants a payment plan with monthly payments of no more than a third of the rent. Tenants have 14 days to respond to that offer.

Landlords also must notify a dispute resolution center in their county. There, mediators will attempt to reach the tenant and broker a deal between the two sides. Once the dispute resolution center certifies that a landlord has gone through that process, the court case can go ahead.

Evictions for lease violations do not have those requirements, meaning those eviction cases can move faster.

While it's too soon to know how many evictions will be filed in Seattle now that the moratorium is over, the King County Dispute Resolution Center has seen a steady stream of landlords issuing 14-day notices. In the last two weeks of February, before the moratorium ended, the center received 679 cases. In the first three days of March, after the Seattle moratorium ended, another 202 cases arrived.

In other parts of the country, a feared "tsunami" of evictions [has largely not materialized](#), likely because of a combination of government assistance programs, court backlogs and people who move out without going to court.

Advocates, attorneys and mediators will begin to get a better idea of the scale of Seattle evictions later this month.

"Like what we've seen in most communities, you don't see this automatic wave of evictions right away because there are a number of tenant protections," McGowan said. "What you see is stress levels going up. For everyone — landlords and tenants."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 WA gas prices continue to soar
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/as-wa-gas-prices-continue-to-soar-here-are-some-tips-for-conserving-fuel/
GIST	<p>In the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, gas prices continue to soar nationwide.</p> <p>The national average price for a gallon of gas hit a record \$4.173 Tuesday, according to AAA.</p> <p>The national average is a staggering 55 cents more than a week ago, 72 cents more than a month ago and \$1.40 more than a year ago.</p>

	<p>On Tuesday, the average price of unleaded gas in Washington hit \$4.546, setting a new state record.</p> <p>Some gas stations on Capitol Hill and in West Seattle on Monday reported prices as high as \$5 per gallon.</p> <p>To see the dizzying rates for yourself, AAA has a daily price watch at gasprices.aaa.com.</p> <p>You can also download the GasBuddy app to find and compare gas prices around you.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Portland: 2 teens die; fentanyl overdose
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/2-portland-teens-die-in-24-hours-from-suspected-fentanyl-ods/ https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/cdc-fentanyl-deaths-triple-among-teens-over-the-last-two-years
GIST	<p>PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A Portland teenager died on Sunday and another died Monday, after both took pills laced with fentanyl, police said.</p> <p>Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid that can be up to 100 times more potent than morphine. A small amount can be fatal.</p> <p>Initial investigation by Portland police showed both teens had blue pills in their possession — know as M30s — which they may have thought were oxycontin or Xanax, Oregon Public Broadcasting reported.</p> <p>The Portland Police Bureau said they released the preliminary information in an effort to prevent another overdose, as they try to track down the source of the pills.</p> <p>Portland Public Schools sent a flyer to families explaining the danger of fentanyl, saying one pill can kill. Officials say any student who comes forward to talk about substance abuse can obtain support without facing disciplinary action.</p> <p>School officials are also urging parents to talk with their children about the risks of taking pills that aren't prescribed to them.</p> <hr/> <p>Portland, Ore — Fentanyl deaths are reaching staggering numbers across the country, with deaths tripling among teens in the last two years, according to the CDC.</p> <p>Often times teens think they are getting a prescription pill, but instead, it's something else that could be laced with a fatal amount of fentanyl.</p> <p>"A growing number of overdoses that are related to fentanyl, contaminating other drugs or masquerading as prescription pills," Dr. Todd Korhtuis with OHSU said.</p> <p>The reality is, most often kids getting these pills are expecting something else - like Adderall or Xanax - not realizing they instead are laced with fentanyl.</p> <p>This is why Dr. Todd Korthuis and 49 other physicians sent a letter to Governor Kate Brown asking her to declare this an emergency, warning that more deaths and tragedy would come of this. The governor denied the claim.</p> <p>On Tuesday, when KATU News asked Gov. Brown's office about it and we received this statement: <i>Every death due to fentanyl is a tragedy, and Governor Brown's heart goes out to the families of the two youth who died of suspected fentanyl overdoses in Portland recently. Expanding access to behavioral health services and substance use disorder prevention, treatment, and recovery services are among Governor Brown's top priorities, and we worked with the Legislature to make significant investments during the legislative session.</i></p>

That investment is in addition to those made over the last several legislative sessions, as well as the Measure 110 funds and opioid settlement money that will become available this year. During the 2021 legislative session, the Governor worked with the Legislature to pass a \$350 million groundbreaking investment in behavioral health and system reforms. Governor Brown is incredibly concerned about the threat fentanyl poses to Oregonians, particularly Oregon youth. The concerns outlined in the referenced letter are of grave importance and the Legislature responded with House Bill 4098 this session—while our office is still reviewing the bill, the Governor is supportive of its goals and, barring any unforeseen issues, we expect she intends to sign it.

It is not clear at this point that an emergency declaration would bring meaningful new state or federal resources to bear that are not already available through the Oregon Health Authority and other state agencies. I'd recommend you follow up with OHA and the ADPC for more information on the specifics of the state's ongoing response to the challenges posed by fentanyl.

Dr. Korthuis says the focus now needs to be education.

“Increasing awareness of the fentanyl problem and particularly targeting younger people who may not be aware that whatever they may be taking may not be as advertised, and may be something that's much more unforgiving and can cause death the first time,” Dr. Korthuis said.

According to the CDC, fentanyl is the leading cause of death among 18-45-year-olds surpassing suicide, COVID-19, and car accidents.

In Multnomah County, though the death toll from fentanyl among teens is low, Health Officer Dr. Jennifer Vines says the county is seeing the same trends.

“I think for comparison, there were two, two deaths in 2020 from fentanyl that were under 18, four in 2021. So, small numbers thankfully, but, but a doubling, which mirrors the same doubling and fentanyl deaths overall in Multnomah County,” Dr. Vines said.

And now, with two more teen deaths by fentanyl suspected in just the first three months of the year, there's a chance that exponential growth could continue.

“I think with the reprieve now that we have from the pandemic, I think this, this is the next crisis,” Dr. Vines said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Alarming: kids severely behind in reading
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/us/pandemic-schools-reading-crisis.html
GIST	<p>BRIDGEPORT, Conn. — The kindergarten crisis of last year, when millions of 5-year-olds spent months outside of classrooms, has become this year's reading emergency.</p> <p>As the pandemic enters its third year, a cluster of new studies now show that about a third of children in the youngest grades are missing reading benchmarks, up significantly from before the pandemic.</p> <p>In Virginia, one study found that early reading skills were at a 20-year low this fall, which the researchers described as “alarming.”</p> <p>In the Boston region, 60 percent of students at some high-poverty schools have been identified as at high risk for reading problems — twice the number of students as before the pandemic, according to Tiffany P. Hogan, director of the Speech and Language Literacy Lab at the MGH Institute of Health Professions in Boston.</p>

Children in every demographic group have been affected, but Black and Hispanic children, as well as those from low-income families, those with disabilities and those who are not fluent in English, have fallen the furthest behind.

“We’re in new territory,” Dr. Hogan said about the pandemic’s toll on reading. If children do not become competent readers by the end of elementary school, the risks are “pretty dramatic,” she said. Poor readers are more likely to drop out of high school, earn less money as adults and become involved in the criminal justice system.

The literacy crisis did not start with the pandemic. In 2019, results on [national](#) and [international](#) exams showed stagnant or declining American performance in reading, and widening gaps between high and low performers. The causes are multifaceted, but many experts point to a shortage of educators trained in [phonics and phonemic awareness](#) — the foundational skills of linking the sounds of spoken English to the letters that appear on the page.

The pandemic has compounded those issues.

Children spent months out of the classroom, where they were supposed to learn the basics of reading — the ABCs, what sound a “b” or “ch” makes. Many first and second graders returned to classrooms needing to review parts of the kindergarten curriculum. But nearly half of public schools have teaching vacancies, especially in special education and the elementary grades, according to a [federal survey](#) conducted in December and January.

Even students with well-trained teachers have had far fewer hands-on hours with them than before the pandemic, which has been defined by closures, uneven access to online instruction, [quarantine periods](#) and — even on the best days — virus-related interruptions to regular classroom routines. Now, schools are under pressure to boost literacy as quickly as possible so students gain the reading skills they need to learn the rest of the curriculum, from math word problems to civics lessons. Billions of federal stimulus dollars are flowing to districts for tutoring and other supports, but their effect may be limited if schools cannot find quality staff members to hire.

At Capital Preparatory Harbor Lower School, a charter elementary school in the working-class coastal city of Bridgeport, Conn., about half of the first graders did not set foot inside a classroom during their crucial kindergarten year. Though the school building reopened in January 2021 on a hybrid schedule, many families, concerned about the virus, opted to continue full-time remote learning.

At the beginning of this school year, when all students returned to in-person learning, more than twice as many first graders as before the pandemic tested at kindergarten levels or below in their literacy skills, according to the administration.

Teachers started with the basics: how to orient and hold a book, and where the names of the author and illustrator could be found. The school is using federal stimulus dollars to create classroom libraries filled with titles that appeal to the largely Black and Hispanic students there, like “Firebird,” about a young, Black dancer by the ballerina Misty Copeland, and “Hair Love,” about a Black father styling his daughter’s hair.

The stimulus money is also paying for a new structured phonics curriculum called [Foundations](#). Given the depth of many students’ struggles with reading, the work has taken on “a level of urgency,” said Garensa John, a first-grade teacher at the school. “Let’s get it done. As soon as they know this, they’ll excel.”

From the start of the pandemic, when schools abruptly shuttered in March 2020, math skills were [clearly affected](#), while [some early research](#) suggested that students’ reading skills were holding steady, perhaps because more parents read with their children at home than practiced math.

But now, “What we’re seeing is that there are a lot of children who didn’t get the stimulation they need” during the pandemic to adequately develop early speech and reading skills, which are closely linked, Dr. Hogan said.

On a Wednesday morning in February, Mrs. John arrayed 13 6- and 7-year-olds on a rug in front of her, and led them through a series of well-rehearsed exercises sounding out simple written letter combinations and words. The children, clad in uniforms, chanted and clapped as they read in unison. The word of the day was a difficult one for many children to read and pronounce: “ships.”

Cameron Segui, 7, wearing a blue surgical mask and black glasses, placed his hand under his chin, a strategy students use to check if their mouths are positioned correctly. The sound “puh” should be made with the jaw relatively high up, for example, with the cheeks puffing out. “Zh” makes the jaw vibrate, but the “sh” and “s” sounds in “ships” should not.

Some parents and educators have argued that masks are partially responsible for language and literacy deficits. But researchers say that unlike the well-documented [connection](#) between school closures and decreased achievement, there is not yet strong evidence that masking has hindered the development of reading skills.

Such conclusions “would just be conjecture at this point,” said Nathan Clemens, a dyslexia expert at the University of Texas, Austin.

Later that day in Mrs. John’s class, students broke into small groups to practice writing and segmenting words into different sounds. Cameron, in one of the more advanced groups, was working on full sentences, and pointed proudly to his writing: “Ben had a red and tan hat,” he read.

The biggest problem for Capital Prep, and many other schools, is a shortage of educators like Mrs. John, 30, a Tufts University graduate who received formal training in phonics instruction in a previous job. Many graduates of teacher-preparation programs lack this skill set, and some of the nation’s most popular reading curriculums do not emphasize it, despite a [large body of research](#) showing it is crucial.

States like Mississippi, Alabama and Massachusetts have begun retraining teachers in phonics and decommissioning outdated curriculum materials. But some efforts were interrupted or slowed by the pandemic.

At Capital Prep, Mrs. John’s students have made big leaps since September. She serves as a model for colleagues, and the school is providing professional development. Still, in February, there were seven open teaching jobs out of 23 at the school, with some students being taught by inexperienced substitutes. Steve Perry, the founder of the Capital Prep charter school network, which has schools in both Connecticut and New York, recently took a trip to Puerto Rico to recruit educators.

Dr. Hogan, the Boston researcher, has a federal grant to provide intensive, small-group tutoring to children at high-poverty schools who are behind on early reading skills. She, too, has struggled to fill open positions, despite pushing the pay to up to \$40 per hour from \$15 per hour.

“I’m running on fumes,” she said.

It does not help that there is surging demand for private reading and speech therapy for children from affluent families. Fees can run up to \$200 per hour, allowing some educators to leave the classroom entirely.

Tamara Cella, a phonics specialist who holds a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University, left the New York City public school system in 2016, frustrated by the strain of principal turnover. In addition to a job at a New Jersey private school, she now moonlights as a phonics tutor for Brooklyn Letters, a company that provides in-home sessions.

	<p>“Tutoring pays extremely well,” Dr. Cella acknowledged.</p> <p>She tutors children facing some of the same challenges as those at Capital Prep — missing core phonics skills, and difficulty transitioning from simple reading exercises to comprehending books. But Dr. Cella worries more about the students she no longer sees.</p> <p>“That feeling of guilt comes over me,” she said. “What about the kids in the Bronx?”</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/09 China flexes in South China Sea
SOURCE	https://asiatimes.com/2022/03/all-eyes-on-ukraine-china-flexes-in-south-china-sea/
GIST	<p>Amid Russia’s ongoing invasion of Ukraine, China has begun flexing its muscles in a clear show of force to regional rivals.</p> <p>Over the weekend, Beijing announced that it will increase its defense spending by 7.1% to US\$229 billion, up from 6.8% last year. This brings official Chinese defense spending to \$229 billion, a whopping figure dwarfing all other regional rivals’ defense budgets combined and second only to the United States globally.</p> <p>China’s actual defense spending is likely significantly higher, with some measurements putting it as high as \$600 billion in recent years.</p> <p>Beijing has also taken a more assertive stance in adjacent waters, with Foreign Minister Wang Yi warning Southeast Asian states against “external interference” in the long-running negotiations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) over a South China Sea Code of Conduct (COC).</p> <p>Previously, China indicated that it would only sign up to the proposed deal if it gives the Asian powerhouse de facto veto power over the prerogative of regional states to conduct joint military exercises and joint energy exploration deals with external powers – a hegemonic stance that prompted a heavy rebuke from Washington.</p> <p>But just as China’s top diplomat expressed optimism over the direction of COC negotiations, Beijing announced almost two weeks-long (March 4 to 15) military drills in the Gulf of Tonkin, which is located just 60 nautical miles (110 kilometers) from Vietnam’s ancient capital of Hue.</p> <p>Last Friday, China’s Hainan Maritime Safety Administration issued a navigation warning, unilaterally banning vessels from entering an area that overlaps with Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ).</p> <p>Hanoi immediately protested the unilateral move, calling on China to “respect Vietnam’s EEZ and continental shelf, stop and not to repeat any act that complicates the situation.”</p> <p>Meanwhile, there are growing indications that China has stepped up its perceived by many as illegal deep-sea exploration activities across the South China Sea and well into the EEZ of neighboring states, in a clear bid to lay claim to and dominate precious resources in the area.</p> <p>Russia’s premeditated invasion of Ukraine has raised deep concerns across the Indo-Pacific over potential provocations by China, Moscow’s top Asian ally.</p> <p>Taiwan, which has been repeatedly threatened with a potential military invasion by top Chinese leaders, has been on high-alert mode. In its latest campaign of intimidation, Chinese fighter jets have repeatedly challenged Taiwan’s airspace, with a People’s Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) Shenyang J-11 fighter most recently piercing into the democratically-governed island’s air defense identification zone (ADIZ).</p>

In response, several [high-level delegations](#) from the US have visited Taiwan in a clear show of bipartisan support amid the heightened tensions. Just days into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US Navy deployed the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Ralph Johnson through the Taiwan Straits.

"The ship's transit through the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," Seventh Fleet spokesperson Nicholas Lingo said in a statement, adding "The United States military flies, sails and operates anywhere international law allows."

Intent on constraining China's naval ambitions in adjacent waters, the Biden administration has stepped up US naval deployments across the region's contested maritime areas. Last year, US carrier strike groups [entered](#) the South China Sea 10 times, significantly more than 2020 (six times) and 2019 (five times).

The US conducted a similar maneuver in late January when the USS Dewey (DDG-105), also an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, sailed through the Taiwan Strait.

Last November, the [Pentagon released a Congress-mandated report](#) that warned that China has the biggest maritime force on the globe with 355 warships. The PLA Navy expected to expand its armada to as many as 420 ships within the next four years and 460 by 2030, according to the report.

In response to China's "growing ambitions" in the high seas, the Pentagon's Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michael Gilday, said that the US Navy needs to expand its own fleet to more than [500 ships](#) in the coming years in order to keep up with the Pentagon's commitment based on a forthcoming National Defense Strategy under the Biden administration.

"We need 12 carriers. We need a strong amphibious force to include nine big-deck amphibies and another 19 or 20 [landing platform docks] to support them. Perhaps 30 or more smaller amphibious ships to support Maritime Littoral Regiments... to 60 destroyers and probably 50 frigates, 70 attack submarines and a dozen ballistic missile submarines to about 100 support ships and probably looking into the future about 150 unmanned," said the US admiral.

But while the US has stepped up its defense commitment to Taiwan, other regional states are vulnerable to China's assertiveness. Vietnam, which has no defense alliance with any major power, is clearly troubled by the ongoing situation.

Since the end of the Cold War, the Vietnamese constitution mandates a "the three no's" foreign policy, namely "no military alliances, no aligning with one country against another, and no foreign military bases on Vietnamese soil."

For the past decade, however, the Southeast Asian country has largely relied [on arms imports](#) from Russia in order to beef up its defensive capabilities, while Russian energy companies have been helping Hanoi to develop offshore oil and gas resources in the South China Sea.

But with Russia now [becoming the world's most sanctioned nation](#), with the West and key Asian economies imposing a new wave of ever-more punishing restrictions on trade and investment deals with Moscow, Vietnam may struggle to maintain robust bilateral ties with its traditional partner.

Vietnam is already [struggling to maintain exports](#) to Russia, while facing [potential US sanctions](#) over future military hardware purchases from the Eurasian power.

China's imposition of a sweeping ban on entry of foreign vessels across portions of Vietnam's EEZ amid 12-day wargames by the PLA this month has underscored Hanoi's trepidation.

"Part of the above-mentioned maritime area belongs to Vietnam's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf as determined under the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)," Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Le Thi Thu Hang said on Monday.

“We ask China to respect Vietnam’s sovereignty and not take actions to complicate the situation, thereby contributing to maintaining peace, security and stability in the East Sea area,” she added, reflecting Vietnam’s growing frustration over China’s impunity in adjacent waters.

Over the past two years, China has rapidly expanded its military and para-military presence across the South China Sea. Record numbers of Chinese militia vessels have been harassing rival states, prompting a naval showdown with the Philippines over the Whitsun Reef in the Spratlys. Chinese coast guard vessels have also been harassing Malaysia energy exploration activities off the coast of Sarawak.

Just as worrying is China’s [expanding deep-sea exploration](#) across the EEZ of rival claimant states.

“China also conducts a significant number of surveys in the South China Sea that don’t make headlines. Automatic identification system (AIS) data on Chinese surveys from 2020 and 2021 demonstrates that China’s survey activities span the entire South China Sea and regularly occur in the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of its Southeast Asian neighbors,” the Washington-based Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative said in a recent report.

“Such surveys for marine scientific research or oil and gas exploration without permission are illegal under international law; those for purely military research are legal but run counter to China’s stated opposition to foreign military surveys within the EEZ,” the report added, underscoring how China’s exploration and surveillance fleet is now also [the largest and most active in the Indo-Pacific](#).

Confident of its expanding footprint in adjacent waters and exploiting new uncertainties unleashed by the ongoing crisis in Europe, China has indicated its openness to expedite the [long-stalled COC negotiations](#).

“China is always confident in the prospect of reaching the COC, because advancing the COC consultation is in the common interests of China and the ASEAN countries, and is also a key move to ensure that the South China Sea becomes a sea of peace and cooperation,” Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in a press conference on Monday.

“We have seen that some non-regional countries are not happy to see the norm being reached and do not want the South China Sea to be calm, because this will make them lose the excuse to meddle in the South China Sea for personal gain,” he added, laying blame on external powers, namely the US, for the deadlock in COC negotiations.

Wang called on ASEAN countries to “see this clearly and jointly resist external interference and sabotage,” echoing Russian-style West-blaming to justify its own assertiveness in the region.

“We will continue to take ASEAN as a priority of China’s diplomacy, firmly safeguard the ASEAN-centered regional cooperation structure, safeguard Southeast Asia’s position as a nuclear-free zone... support the use of ASEAN to mediate regional hot spot issues and oppose the creation of cliques and divisions within the region,” Wang said, while warning regional states against seeking assistance from and alliance with external powers such as the US.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Psychological profiles of world leaders
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/putin-russia-profiling-world-leaders-intelligence-matters/
GIST	In this episode of <i>Intelligence Matters</i> , host Michael Morell speaks with Kenneth Dekleva, a psychiatrist, former U.S. Department of State Regional Medical Officer, and Senior Fellow at the George H.W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, about how experts compile psychological profiles of world leaders. Morell and Dekleva discuss the formative experiences and core characteristics of Russian president Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, and Supreme Leader of Iran Ayatollah Khamanei. They also discuss the character of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, as well as how other countries might approach similar profiles of U.S. leaders.

HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Vladimir Putin:** "I think he's pragmatic, he's ruthless. He has ambition. He has a goal to resurrect the former Soviet Union, the sphere of influence. And he wants to disrupt and rewrite the post-1991 Cold War order...his ruthlessness is not new. I'm sorry to say that... Putin abhors weakness. So I think we don't want to put him in a position of feeling weakened or beaten or humiliated because that can lead to further problems down the road."
- **Volodymyr Zelensky:** "I think it's probably easy to say that many people, including the Russians, thought that he was a lightweight. But he found a degree of courage that is just remarkable... I think he's also a heroic figure of our time, almost Churchillian, because after this horrid pandemic of the last two years, there's really - and many people would argue - that there's a lack of real leadership in many parts of the world, including, sadly, in the West. And Zelensky has taught us that leadership is real and that leadership matters."
- **Kim Jong Un:** "I don't think he'll give up his nuclear weapons. I think he's a very ruthless leader. But I think he's also an aspirational leader. He's a millennial, if you will... And I think he's sent certain messages ...that he's here for the long run and that he's going to figure out a way to try and resolve the conundrum of North Korea's economy and make it, as he put it in his speech about eight years ago, that people can loosen their belts. I think we see this in how he's recently taking care of his health over the last year. He's lost a significant amount of weight, likely due to bariatric surgery. He has multiple cardiac and stroke risk factors. He's a chain smoker. He was probably morbidly obese. He may have hypertension and diabetes, but he's lost about 40 or 50 pounds."

INTELLIGENCE MATTERS - Kenneth Dekleva transcript

PRODUCER: Olivia Gazis

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, welcome to the show. It's great to have you on intelligence matters.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Thank you very much, Michael, for having me. I've been a longtime fan of your show and I'm greatly honored to be on it.

MICHAEL MORELL: So let's dig right in - the analysis of foreign leaders that you do. What do you call that type of analysis? And then can you describe what it is? Can you describe what questions you are asking and answering about a particular individual?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Of course. The analysis that I do is what I would call 'leadership analysis,' or others have called it 'leadership psychology.' It draws from a long tradition, starting with the process during World War II, when a psychiatrist, Dr Langer, at the request of General William Donovan, prepared with a team a psychological profile around 1943 of Germany's chancellor Adolf Hitler.

This tradition was later continued at the CIA by my friend and mentor, the late Dr. Jerrold Post, who founded such a unit in the mid-sixties and led it for 21 years. And again, from a national security perspective, the goal was to prepare psychological profiles of world leaders, particularly adversaries, for the national security community, the policy community and for our own leaders all the way up to and including the president.

MICHAEL MORELL: You know, I should mention that the most prestigious award that an analyst can earn at CIA is actually named the Langer Award after the individual who did that, that leadership profile of Adolf Hitler. Interesting.

So how long have you been doing this? When did you start? Take us through a little bit of that background.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I became interested in this kind of work - interested is maybe a misnomer - fascinated when I first encountered the work of Dr. Post when I was a resident in psychiatry in the early

'90s. You and your listeners may recall that Dr. Post prepared and published a profile of Iraq's then-leader Saddam Hussein, and testified before the House Armed Services Committee.

So I found this intersection of psychiatry, psychology and international relations really to be quite fascinating.

So fast-forward a couple of years, I gave Dr. Post a phone call just to introduce myself and chat, and he asked me what I was writing about, and I said, 'I'm preparing a profile of Radovan Karadzic' - the leader of the Bosnian Serbs, who now sits in a prison cell in The Hague for war crimes. I speak fluent Serbian and I had translated Karadzic's haunting, eerie poetry to try to understand the psyche of this person - who was a notable psychiatrist and poet in the former Yugoslavia and then turned into a genocidal war criminal.

Well, it turned out Dr. Post was also working on this. So thus began a collaboration, and we published profiles of both Dr. Karadzic and Serbia's leader, the late Slobodan Milosevic, in the late '90s.

MICHAEL MORELL: So Ken, how do you deal with a question that I'm sure you get from time to time, which is: it's hard enough to do this kind of analysis when you can actually meet with the person you're assessing, talk to them, have sessions with them. How is it then possible to do that from, say, 10,000 miles away? Never having had a discussion with the person - how do you answer that question?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: It's very difficult, and it certainly can put some limitations on the conclusions that are drawn following the model of that I mentioned of Dr. Post. People like myself who do this kind of work will review all of the leaders' writings, speeches, videos; in today's day and age, social media posts - both primary sources that the leaders have written, secondary sources about the leader.

And I've been fortunate in my work of being able to talk to high-level dignitaries who have been in the room with every single leader who I've profiled, so that helps a lot.

It's kind of a reality check: Is the profile that I'm creating off-base or off the mark or not even close to being realistic? The other thing I'm careful to do - I'm trained as a psychiatrist, and I think that that has value in this kind of analysis that it teaches one to empathize and humanize even people who have done horrible things - and my motto in this work is from the philosopher Terrence: 'Nothing which is human is alien to me.'

But I think having the ability to talk to people as well who've met with the leader can help understand some of the psychological traits of the leader, which can be useful in understanding a leader's behavior in crises, in negotiations, in diplomacy and in other political actions.

MICHAEL MORELL: Is the level of difficulty of analyzing a leader the same from leader to leader? Or does it differ by leader? Are some leaders tougher to analyze than others?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: That's a great question. The leaders that I've focused on for the last several years since I left my government service have been among what you would call the hardest of hard targets, such as Russia's President Vladimir Putin, China's President Xi Jinping and North Korea's Chairman Kim Jong Un.

These are hard targets because, even though in the case of Putin and Xi, they've been in power for a long time - Putin for over 20 years, and Xi Jinping for over 10 years - and we have many senior leaders in our administration and previous administrations that have met with them, they're still very opaque and very challenging. So that makes it very, very difficult to get a good read on the leader's psyche and state of mind, their goals, their negotiating strategy.

So there's a lot of psychology besides just individual psychology. Negotiation psychology is very important. Understanding the context of international relations is very important. Rather than just using psychiatric labeling to call a leader a narcissist or a malignant narcissist, something like that, that's probably not as helpful.

MICHAEL MORELL: And who's the leader that you assessed who was the most difficult to understand?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I would say Kim Jong Un, because I wrote a profile of Kim Jong Il back in 2010, after he had had his stroke and in August of 2008, and they were the hardest to access because there was simply less data available.

That being said, even though there's lots of data - Xi Jinping and Putin have met with many world leaders, they published their own writings, there's been a lot written about them. A lot of excellent stuff written about Putin; I would recommend Fiona Hill's book, 'Operative in the Kremlin.' Excellent biographies of Xi - there's still a degree of opacity that makes even these leaders a challenge to understand.

That's true now more than ever in the case of Vladimir Putin and certainly more salient than ever, as Europe is now facing a horrific war for the first time in decades.

MICHAEL MORELL: So, Ken, great transition because I wanted to go to Putin next. So tell us about him. And in answering that question, I'd love to get your perspective on if he has changed. If so, how he has changed, in what ways and why?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Let me let me start with the last point. In one sense, he's changed in that he's a man in more of a hurry. And certainly the the current thinking is that he's slipped up, he's made a strategic error. But that being said, if the intelligence that he was fed had been correct, then we probably wouldn't be having this conversation, but there were several levels of error. And it may reflect his own cognitive thinking or rigidity, if you will, cognitive rigidity or lack of flexibility. But it may be that he was thrown a curve ball, to borrow a term from American intelligence about two decades ago.

For example, he was likely told by his intelligence leadership in the FSB and SVR and GRU that this operation - that President Zelensky was weak and unpopular and would flee or fold quickly. He was probably told that, based on our humiliating withdrawal in Afghanistan, that the Western allies, including President Biden, would not rise to the occasion as they have.

He was likely told that this would be a mop-up operation - he even used the word 'operation' in his speech last night, that it would be over in a couple of days, and that most likely he would have installed a puppet regime.

But he didn't factor in the response of President Biden leading our allies, including new allies such as Chancellor Scholz - and also the real wild card here has been the courage of President Zelensky. Everyone got him wrong, including us. We offered him a plane ticket out and he said, 'I want ammunition, not a ride.' He's really kind of been the wild card here in a beautiful and courageous way. And his courage, his heroism has inspired the world, not just the Ukrainian people. I think that caught surely Putin and his leadership by surprise.

One other thing that I think President Putin miscalculated is he controls the information space in Russia, but he doesn't have control of the information space in the Ukraine, let alone Europe and the rest of the world. So this, in a way, is a huge strategic intelligence failure for Putin and his leadership.

MICHAEL MORELL: OK, so what about Putin, the man?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Everyone by now knows his story of his hardscrabble upbringing and then Leningrad in the aftermath, the tragic aftermath of World War II, raised by a a hard working mom with a third-grade education and a disabled special forces veteran father who was very courageous and wounded in a special operation during World War II. They barely survived the siege of Leningrad, the 900-day siege; his mother almost starved to death. She lost a child during the war.

And so Putin basically grew up as an only child in a hardscrabble tenement - in Russia they called them communal - and the he was a street fighter, a street kid who was bullied. And there, like many people who

do that, he took up martial arts - judo, which gave him a sense of order and discipline. And he also, as a young student, began his study of the German language.

And he evolved over time. His dream was to be a KGB officer. He did. And then after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, he shifted to politics and has become a highly successful politician. And I would say diplomat.

And of course, people have spoken about his mastery of judo and his tactical skills. But I think he's also very strategic.

Unfortunately, there's one other label that may get added to those labels, and it's very tragic for Russia, even for Putin and for the world. And that label may be 'war criminal,' depending on what happens in the next several weeks with the indiscriminate bombing of civilian centers in Ukraine.

MICHAEL MORELL: Would you call him pragmatic?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Yes.

MICHAEL MORELL: And do you think - that's certainly a label that I would have put on him, you know, 10 years ago - would you still put that label on him today?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Yes, I would. I think he's a rational actor. I think he's pragmatic. I think he, again, I think it's a false assumption to think that he's somehow more erratic or that he's lost his mental faculties because an operation has gone wrong.

If any of those intelligence variables that I mentioned a few minutes ago have changed, if Zelensky had fled, I think Putin would be rejoicing in victory right now as we speak.

So those were the wild cards that even many people couldn't predict. So I think he's pragmatic, he's ruthless. He has ambition. He has a goal to resurrect the former Soviet Union, the sphere of influence. And he wants to disrupt and rewrite the post-1991 Cold War order.

He's also incredibly, incredibly ruthless, but we've seen that ruthlessness before, in the bombing of Grozny in Georgia in 2008 and the takeover of Crimea and the Donbass since 2014. In Syria in 2015, and 2016, his ordering, or sanctioning, at a minimum, the murders of Litvinenko in London in 2006 with Polonium 210, the attempted assassination of former GRU officer in Salisbury, England, Sergei Skripal, with Novichok a banned chemical weapon, his attempted assassination of Navalny, his other murders. Boris Nemtsov comes to mind. His ruthlessness is not new. I'm sorry to say that.

MICHAEL MORELL: So Ken, given how ruthless he is, how dangerous can he be here in terms of the types of tactics he might use in Ukraine, the types of weapons he might use in Ukraine, even chemical weapons and perhaps a tactical nuclear weapon? How do you think about that?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I think he's very dangerous and because he's a bit unexpectedly cornered, that makes him more dangerous. This is a mixture of a war, a diplomatic negotiation that's going on behind the scenes, and a hostage negotiation where he's basically - because he has nuclear weapons, he's in a sense holding Ukraine and the West hostage. So it's very dangerous and it's very delicate. So I share the concerns of many of your listeners in this regard.

I think the attack on the reactor, if not accidental, there are certainly arguments that could be made that it was deliberate to show the ruthlessness and brutality that he's capable of. Because if that reactor core had melted down, all of southern Ukraine would become uninhabitable. So I think he seeks, in that sense, to destroy the idea of Ukraine as a country, and he's written and spoken about that for decades.

This is not new. In 2007, or 2008 he told then-President Bush Ukraine is not a real country. And he and his inner circle - his increasingly isolated inner circle - National Security Council chair Patrushev, FSB

director Bortnikov, SVR Director Sergei Naryshkin, Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu, are in alignment with that kind of thinking, so that's a very dangerous situation.

The other thing I would add, Michael, is I think it's important to realize that finding diplomatic solutions even while the fighting is going on and the sanctions are being strengthened and we're giving weapons to the Ukraine is very important, and I think the key to this, when it ends - I fear it will get worse before it gets better, as Mike Vickers said on your program earlier this week.

But when it when it ends, I think Putin needs an offramp or a face-saving way where he can quote, 'declare victory,' unquote and retreat back to his lair. Sometimes it's better to let the bear run out of the cage back into the forest.

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, I want to ask you maybe two more questions about the current situation we face between Russia and Ukraine. Do you think that Putin sees a face-saving way out of this?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I'm not sure - that's an excellent question. I think part of the job of our expert diplomats -and we're very lucky to have expert diplomats and intelligence officials at the most senior levels. And I especially want to highlight the role of CIA director Bill Burns, who served as a former ambassador to Russia, is if he doesn't see it to offer different solutions that he can grasp and make him think that they were his own.

This is what hostage negotiators trained in the FBI such as Gary Noesner, Christopher Voss and others such as Germany's Matthias Schraner called 'tactical empathy.' Empathy is a loaded word here because people are saying, 'How can you empathize with someone who does horrible evil things? How can you empathize with someone who may be a war criminal?'

But empathy doesn't mean sympathy or assent. It means you have to try to understand what he wants and what his ambition is and give him some kind of a tactical, face-saving way where he can delicately retreat without feeling humiliated.

A humiliated Putin is a dangerous Putin and part of his mindset, you may remember, Michael, after the horrific 2004 terrorist attacks in Beslan, a school in southern Russia where several hundred children were killed, Putin was very emotional on national TV, and he said, 'We were beaten because we were weak.' So Putin abhors weakness. So I think we don't want to put him in a position of feeling weakened or beaten or humiliated because that can lead to further problems down the road.

MICHAEL MORELL: And then, Ken, just one more question. You mentioned the strength of President Zelensky, of Ukraine and how he's surprised all of us. Why? Why did he surprise us? Why did we miss understanding who this person really was?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I don't know, but I suspect it's because he's not a natural politician - although now he's shown that he is. But he was a famous actor and he was on TV programs and in a movie and he was thought to be weak and functioning in a government that has struggled with corruption for many, many years.

And I think it's probably easy to say that many people, including the Russians, thought that he was a lightweight. But he found a degree of courage that is just remarkable. And I would encourage your your listeners to watch his beautiful, moving, eight-minute speech last Saturday to the Russian people, where he talked about the ties that bind the Ukraine and Russia, the humanity of Russians.

He grew up speaking Russian. He's an ethnically Russian Jew. He talked about his best friends living in the Donbass, how they would go drinking and watch soccer matches together. And you know, he talked about the ties that bind, not the ties that divide.

I think he's also a heroic figure of our time, almost Churchillian, because after this horrid pandemic of the last two years, there's really - and many people would argue - that there's a lack of real leadership in many

parts of the world, including, sadly, in the West. And Zelensky has taught us that leadership is real and that leadership matters.

MICHAEL MORELL: You know, when I was managing and leading people at the agency, I often thought that you don't really understand who they are until they're put under significant stress. And maybe that's a little of what happened here, right. This was the first time where he was put under a tremendous amount of stress, and, you know, a man of character appeared before us.

KENNETH BEKLEVA: Yes. And I live in Texas. In Texas, they would say he's been river-baptized.

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, what I'd love to do now, if it's OK, is I'd love to switch to other important world leaders. And what I'd love to do is to throw out a name and give you a couple of minutes to talk about what makes that person tick, how you think about them. And I'd love to start with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Xi Jinping is a fascinating leader and I think one of the most formidable leaders in the world today. He, unlike Putin, he's not a disruptor. I think he wants to work within the existing world order, but wants to shape it to one that is more China-centric or friendly to the national interests of China and the Communist Party of China.

He's a fascinating character in the sense that he grew up - he's in his late 60s. He grew up as a child of privilege. His father was one of the founders of the Modern People's Republic of China and was one of the Group of Eight on the Long March with Mao Tse Tung and was one of the youngest vice ministers during Xi Jinping's childhood.

But then, when Xi was a teenager, his father was purged and then Xi himself was arrested by the Red Guards at the height of the Cultural Revolution and threatened with execution. And he was 14 at the time. They held a gun to his head and said, 'We can kill you 100 times.' He said, 'I don't see the difference between a hundred and one, so, please proceed.' And then they let him go and sent him away to a rural, a remote rural area where he performed hard manual labor away from family friends for the next eight or nine years.

And he gave a fascinating interview in 2000, which was very little known at the time, to a journalist where he talked about the lessons that he learned from that and he uses a language of resilience. He says, 'a knife is sharpened on a stone.' He says, 'Whenever I have challenging situations in my current life, I always draw back to those years to find my strength.' So I think he certainly is formidable and remarkable in his tale of resilience and his ability during the - especially during his first term - to marry that personal narrative of resilience with his larger narrative of the great dream of China's rejuvenation, has been very successful.

MICHAEL MORELL: How do you think he perceives us in how we fit into his worldview?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I think he mistakenly perceives us - and the head of one of the Chinese think tanks, Yuan Peng wrote last year, he's the head of the CICIR which is sort of their think tank of the Ministry of State Security - he gave a speech, and it was an essay where they basically say the east is rising and the west is foundering, or we're weak. And he sees our society as weak. He sees our leaders as weak, as Putin does.

I mean, with all due respect to President Biden, the week before the Ukraine invasion, his popularity ratings were 39 percent across multiple polls. Both the Russians, the Chinese and our other adversaries, such as the North Koreans, Iranians and others, are very well informed and read this stuff.

But they make a mistake, I think, because Xi, like Putin and perhaps like Chairman Kim, underestimate what America is. They underestimate American exceptionalism. They underestimate our history, our ability to rise from the doldrums and to bounce back. The classic example of this is President Reagan's

term. So I think they have to be careful in that regard. They tend to - they run a very real risk of underestimating American leadership, American resilience and American history.

MICHAEL MORELL: So Ken, next on my list here is North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Kim Jong Un is a fascinating leader also, and one that has been easily misunderstood, and a very difficult target. Until 2018, he had not met with a foreign leader when he took power in December of 2011, when his father died of a massive cardiac arrest. So there was very little information about him.

But I think we know more now, based on the speeches that we've seen since his ascent to power and information that comes out of official North Korean channels, information from South Korean intelligence, and our own information from President Trump's meetings with Chairman Kim during 2018 at the Singapore summit and Hanoi in 2019 and at the DMZ later in 2019.

My sense of Kim is that again, I don't think he'll give up his nuclear weapons. I think he's a very ruthless leader. But I think he's also an aspirational leader. He's a millennial, if you will. And I think he's sent certain messages over the last, if you will, implicit and explicit messages, that he's here for the long run and that he's going to figure out a way to try and resolve the conundrum of North Korea's economy and make it, as he put it in a speech about eight years ago, that people can loosen their belts, if you will.

I think we see this in how he's recently taking care of his health over the last year. He's lost a significant amount of weight, likely due to bariatric surgery. He has multiple cardiac and stroke risk factors. He's a chain smoker. He was probably morbidly obese. He may have hypertension and diabetes, but he's lost about 40 or 50 pounds. He looks a lot fitter than he did several years ago, when there were descriptions that he was even huffing and puffing while walking during negotiations with South Koreans and with President Trump in 2018.

There was a video this week on North Korean state television that showed him digging a large hole to plant a tree. He looked pretty energetic there. So I think he's going to be somebody that we have to contend with for quite some time. But I see him as an aspirational person in the long run for North Korea.

MICHAEL MORELL: And was it that aspirational aspect of his personality, his mindset, that led him into that special relationship with President Trump?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Yes. And I would put not only with President Trump, but with President Moon. They met four times - and with President Xi - I think they've had three meetings in 2018 and they've had two in 2019.

You remember that in September of 2018, where President Moon and Chairman Kim and their wives climbed to the summit of Mount Paektu, which is a very sacred holy mountain in Korean and North Korean mythology and lore. And I think there was a sense of triumphalism that he had come out on the world stage and held his own.

And the former Russian ambassador, I think Gleb Ivashentsov, to South Korea, said in 2019, 'Kim's remarkable, he went - during 2019, he emerged from his isolation to meet with the most powerful leaders in the world: President Trump, President Putin, President Xi and other leaders such as President Moon, the prime ministers of Vietnam and Singapore, and held his own as a statesman.'

So I think that's an important part of who he is and if he did it once, he can do it again.

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, the Supreme Leader in Iran.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I've not formally studied the Supreme Leader, but what we know about him is he's in his 80s and he has health issues. There are numerous reports that he's had prostate cancer for several years - treated, and, being a being a clinician, I can tell your listeners that I treat many cancer

patients, and now with modern treatments available, patients that would have died in a year or two when I was a medical student or resident can now live for five or 10 years. I've had patients who have outlived their oncologists, with late-stage cancers, including late-stage prostate cancer.

So I think the Supreme Leader is taking a hard line in I think the the JCPOA talks, which President Biden is trying to revive. I think the Iranians have taken very, very tough, strong negotiating positions, and they're not likely to budge.

And that raises the issue of sanctions. Iran, of course, has been under crippling sanctions for a very long time. But one of the frustrations of leaders in the West, including President Biden and others who plan sanctions regimes against these adversarial leaders such as Putin, Xi Kim, the Supreme Leader of Iran, is that the adversarial leaders can adapt to sanctions over time to where they they figure out workarounds. And these are also countries that also have a civilizational aspect to them in their own proud history. And they have the capability, if you will, of digging in their heels.

MICHAEL MORELL: Yeah. So I'm wondering, given his given his age, given his health, given the fact that he made a deal once with the United States and had the rug pulled out from underneath him, if it's going to be pretty tough for him to agree to to another deal at this point,

KENNETH DEKLEVA: I think so, Michael, and I think he probably was a reluctant person to go along with that deal. But the new president, Raisi, who is likely to become the Supreme Leader when the current Supreme Leader dies, when Supreme Leader Khamenei dies, is as much of a hardliner as the current Supreme Leader. So I don't expect a change. And I think in the sense of broken deals like that, if you will, our adversaries never forget and they never forgive.

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, it's been great to have you. I just want to ask you one more question. And I know you haven't formally studied him, but any thoughts about President Biden and his leadership styles, how a person who does what you do, maybe in another country, is looking at President Biden?

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Two points, Michael. One is because of the nature of my work and because I am a former senior diplomat, I don't profile American politicians. But what I will say is that there are people who do what I and others in the intelligence community do in China, in Iran, in Russia and in other countries, in the West, in Israel. And they will be studying President Biden's negotiating strategies, his biography, his psychology, if you will, his health in the same way that we study those of our adversaries.

MICHAEL MORELL: Yeah, I'd love to get a look at those.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Me too.

MICHAEL MORELL: Ken, thank you so much for joining us. It's been a fascinating discussion and we'll have to get you back someday.

KENNETH DEKLEVA: Thank you for having me, Michael.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 WHO: cases, deaths continue drop
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-19-cases-deaths-continue-drop-globally-83336667
GIST	<p>LONDON -- The number of new coronavirus cases and deaths globally have continued to fall in the past week, the World Health Organization said Wednesday, with only the Western Pacific reporting an increase in COVID-19.</p> <p>In its latest report on the pandemic issued on Wednesday, the U.N. health agency said new COVID-19 infections dropped by 5% in the last week, continuing a declining trend that started more than a month ago. Deaths were also down by 8% and have been falling globally for the last two weeks.</p>

Only the Western Pacific saw a rise in coronavirus cases, reporting a 46% increase. In the last week, Hong Kong has been recording about 150 deaths per day, giving it the world's highest death rate per 1 million people, according to data from Oxford University.

The highly infectious omicron variant has recently overwhelmed the semi-autonomous Chinese city, prompting mass quarantines, supermarket panic buying and even the city's morgues are overflowing, forcing authorities to store bodies in refrigerated shipping containers.

Elsewhere, COVID-19 is falling significantly; the biggest declines were seen in the Middle East and Africa, where cases dropped by 46% and 40%, respectively.

"The mildness of the omicron wave, its low death toll and the fact that it is rapidly disappearing, has created the widespread impression that COVID-19 is over," said Salim Abdool Karim of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. He said it's still unclear when the pandemic might end, but said the low death toll during the omicron surge was striking.

Many scientists have credited that to the booster immunization programs undertaken in numerous rich countries, which have broken the connection between COVID-19 infection and severe disease.

Earlier this week, an expert group convened by WHO said it "strongly supports urgent and broad access" to booster doses of COVID-19 vaccine amid the global spread of omicron, capping a reversal of the U.N. agency's repeated insistence last year that boosters weren't necessary for healthy people.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus pleaded with rich countries not to offer boosters and to send doses to Africa instead, saying there was no scientific justification to warrant boosters for healthy people.

Numerous scientific studies have since proven that booster doses of authorized vaccines help restore waning immunity and protect against serious COVID-19, especially amid the global spread of omicron.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Austria suspends vaccine mandate
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/austria-suspends-vaccine-mandate-enforcement-starts-83336186
GIST	<p>BERLIN -- The Austrian government said Wednesday that it won't start enforcing a vaccine mandate for most adults in mid-March as it had planned.</p> <p>The mandate for people 18 and over became law in early February, 2 ½ months after the plan was first announced amid a surge of delta-variant cases that sent the country into a since-lifted lockdown.</p> <p>By then, much of the sense of urgency had disappeared.</p> <p>The plan was for police in mid-March to start checking people's vaccination status during traffic stops and checks on coronavirus restrictions. People who can't produce proof of vaccination would be asked in writing to do so and would be fined up to 600 euros (\$653) if they don't. Fines could reach 3,600 euros if people contest their punishment.</p> <p>But public broadcaster ORF reported that the government said Wednesday the mandate was being suspended and there is currently no need to enforce it. A commission of experts is to re-evaluate the situation in mid-June.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Istanbul police block Women's Day march
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/riot-police-fire-gas-block-womens-day-march-83322189

GIST	<p>ISTANBUL -- Riot police set up barricades and fired pepper gas to block demonstrators from joining an International Women's Day march in central Istanbul on Tuesday. At least 38 women were detained, media reports said.</p> <p>As in previous years, authorities declared the city's main square, Taksim, and surrounding areas off-limits for demonstrations. Riot police then put up metal barricades around Taksim and on side streets leading to the square as well as to a nearby pedestrian thoroughfare.</p> <p>Police fired the gas to disperse groups of demonstrators who tried to break through police lines. At least one woman fainted, affected by the gas, according to Halk TV broadcaster.</p> <p>A group of demonstrators meanwhile, were detained as they tried to board a ferry across the Bosphorus to join the march, Cumhuriyet newspaper reported.</p> <p>Demonstrators in Turkey use the March 8 Women's Day events to press for strong measures to prevent violence against women by former partners or family members. At least 73 women were killed in Turkey since the start of the year, according to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform.</p> <p>President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government withdrew Turkey from a European treaty on combating violence against women last year, drawing similar protests and widespread international condemnation. The move came after some members of Erdogan's Islam-oriented party advocated a review of the agreement, arguing it ran against Turkey's conservative values.</p> <p>Last week, Erdogan promised a set of judicial reforms to curb acts of violence against women. The measures foresee increased prison terms when the victims of killings, injuries, torture or ill-treatment are women, he said. They would make persistent stalking a crime and allow authorities to assign free-of-charge lawyers for women victims of violence.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/07 'Z' symbolizes Russians support invasion
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/07/world/europe/russia-letter-z-ivan-kuliak.html
GIST	<p>The "Z" first drew attention several weeks ago when it was painted a couple feet high on the sides of the thousands of tanks, armored personnel carriers and other military vehicles mustering along the Russian border with Ukraine.</p> <p>In Russia, the letter then began to pop up all over the place. There are Z stickers on the backs of cars and commercial vehicles, and one talk show pundit recently appeared wearing a T-shirt with a large white Z on it.</p> <p>Some corporate logos and newspaper names that contained a Z manipulated the letter to highlight it. An advertising campaign using billboards in large cities featured a large Z created out of a black and orange ribbon, the St. George ribbon, which is a symbol of the Russian military.</p> <p>It is not uncommon for vehicles dedicated to a military campaign to display a readily identifiable mark — U.S. Army vehicles used to repulse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait were painted with a big white chevron, for example. To see it spread among civilians is another matter.</p> <p>The campaign's ubiquity led many to conclude that it was an orchestrated Kremlin effort to drum up support for the war, not least because it resembled so many previous efforts. It came with a hashtag with echoes of past wars: "We don't abandon our own." (As in soldiers.)</p> <p>"This is definitely a state-induced meme," said Vasily Gatov, a Russian-American media analyst based in Boston. "There are always people receptive to this kind of message." He noted that there was a small army of propagandists paid to spread the meme on social media to give it the false appearance of popularity.</p>

The fact that some of the usual suspects lined up added to the sense of government coordination.

Maria Butina [was deported](#) from the United States in 2019 after being sent to prison for working as an unregistered agent for Russia. Now [a member of the State Duma](#), or Parliament, she posted a video of herself drawing a white Z on the lapel of her suit jacket.

“Do your work, brothers,” she said in an apparent reference to the Russian troops in Ukraine. “We will always support you.”

The state-run RT television network also spread the symbol.

Another video online showed what looked like a youth flash mob in a factory or meeting hall, wearing black T-shirts with a Z and dancing in formation amid a sea of Russian flags. Similar videos have cropped up during previous Kremlin campaigns, the only difference being the addition of the T-shirts.

Critics on social media did not miss the opportunity to point out that Hitler mobilized thousands of black-shirted supporters, as well, and some manipulated the letter Z to make it resemble the Nazi swastika.

No doubt some of the displays reflected genuine support. On Saturday, for example, the Russian gymnast Ivan Kuliak wore a Z on his uniform at a competition in Qatar that also included Ukrainian gymnasts. The Russian head coach and some fellow Russian gymnasts publicly defended him, even as the sport’s international governing body opened a disciplinary proceeding.

The symbol has also been deployed as a threat: Anton Dolin, a prominent film critic who left Russia over his opposition to the war, posted a picture on Facebook of a giant white Z that someone had spray-painted on his apartment door, which he called an effort at intimidation.

Oddly for a nationalist symbol, the Z being used is the version from the Latin alphabet. The Russian version, from the Cyrillic alphabet, is more rounded, like a 3.

After weeks of speculation about what it meant, the Russian Defense Ministry said on Sunday that it came from the preposition “Za,” the first word in the Russian phrase “Za pobedu,” or “For victory.”

That explanation seemed to have provoked a sharp exchange on Monday in the United Nations Security Council, where the Ukrainian ambassador, Sergiy Kyslytsya, said that the “Z” actually stood for “zveri,” which means beasts or animals in Russian. His Russian counterpart, Vasily Nebenzya, shot back that the Russians had their own opinion of who the animals were.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Kyiv air raid sirens; Russia pressures cities
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/air-alert-declared-kyiv-fighting-continues-83334558
GIST	<p>LVIV, Ukraine -- Air raid sirens blared over Ukraine's capital on Wednesday as officials said they were bolstering defenses in key cities threatened by Russian forces.</p> <p>Thousands of people are thought to have been killed, both civilians and soldiers, in almost two weeks of fighting since President Vladimir Putin's forces invaded. While Russian troops have seen their advance slowed by fiercer than expected Ukrainian resistance, they have laid siege to several cities, trapping civilians inside them with little or no food, water or medicine.</p> <p>Repeated efforts to establish safe evacuation routes out of several urban areas have failed, though a few thousand people managed to flee the northeastern city of Sumy via a safe corridor on Tuesday. Residents of the encircled Azov Sea port of Mariupol were not so lucky: Some of the worst desperation of the war is unfolding there, but an attempt to evacuate civilians and deliver badly needed supplies failed, with Ukrainian officials saying Russian forces had fired on the convoy before it reached the city.</p>

Ukrainian authorities announced Russia has agreed to a new daylong cease-fire along several evacuation routes for civilians fleeing besieged or occupied cities Wednesday, though it is unclear whether Russian forces will respect it.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's general staff of the armed forces said in a statement that it was building up defenses in cities in the north, south and east, and that forces around Kyiv, the capital, were resisting the Russian offensive with unspecified strikes and "holding the line."

In the northern city of Chernihiv, Russian forces are placing military equipment among residential buildings and on farms, the Ukrainian general staff said. And in the south, it said Russians dressed in civilian clothes are advancing on the city of Mykolaiv, a Black Sea shipbuilding center of a half-million people.

It did not provide any details of new fighting.

Talks aimed at ending the fighting have so far yielded little, but the foreign ministers from Russia and Ukraine are expected to meet in Turkey on Thursday, according to Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

The meeting was to take place on the sidelines of a summit hosted by Turkey, a NATO member nation, but no further details were announced.

In Kyiv, back-to-back air alerts Wednesday morning urged residents to get to bomb shelters as quickly as possible over fears of incoming Russian missiles. An all-clear was given for each alert soon afterward.

Such alerts are intermittent, keeping people on edge. Kyiv has been relatively quiet in recent days, though Russian artillery has pounded the outskirts.

Kyiv regional administration head Oleksiy Kuleba said the crisis for civilians was growing in the capital, with the situation particularly critical in the city's suburbs.

"Russia is artificially creating a humanitarian crisis in the Kyiv region, frustrating the evacuation of people and continuing shelling and bombing small communities," he said.

More than 2 million people have now fled Ukraine, according to the United Nations.

As Moscow's forces have laid siege to Ukrainian cities, the fighting has thwarted attempts to create corridors to safely evacuate civilians.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said Wednesday that Russian authorities confirmed a new cease-fire along evacuation corridors out of Sumy, Mariupol, Enerhodar in the south, Volnovakha in the southeast, Izyum in the east, and several towns in the Kyiv region.

All the corridors lead to sites elsewhere in Ukraine that are currently held by the Ukrainian government; previous Russian proposals to establish evacuation routes into Russia or ally Belarus were widely criticized.

The route out of Sumy, on the Russian border, is the only one that has been used successfully so far, allowing for the evacuation of 5,000 people, including 1,700 foreign students, on Tuesday southwest to the city of Poltava.

Ukrainian officials released videos Wednesday showing trucks and buses with red cross symbols heading to besieged cities

Russia, which calls its invasion of Ukraine a “special military operation,” has focused official statements about the war almost exclusively on fighting and evacuations in the separatist regions, where Russian-backed forces have been fighting Ukraine’s military since 2014.

On Wednesday, Defense Ministry spokesman Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov said Russian forces had thwarted a large-scale attack plot in the east, citing in a televised statement what he claimed was an intercepted Ukrainian National Guard document.

He did not address Russia’s shelling, airstrikes and attacks on Ukrainian civilians or cities, Russian military casualties or any other aspect of its bogged-down campaign.

In the south, Russian troops have advanced deep along Ukraine’s coastline in an effort that could establish a land bridge to Crimea, which Moscow seized from Ukraine in 2014.

The city of Mariupol has been surrounded by Russian soldiers for days and a humanitarian crisis is unfolding in the encircled city of 430,000.

Corpses lie in the streets of the city, which sits on the Asov Sea. Hungry people break into stores in search of food and melt snow for water. Thousands huddle in basements, trembling at the sound of Russian shells pounding their city.

“Why shouldn’t I cry?” Goma Janna demanded as she wept by the light of an oil lamp below ground, surrounded by women and children. “I want my home, I want my job. I’m so sad about people and about the city, the children.”

Mariupol, said Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk, is in a “catastrophic situation.”

Natalia Mudrenko, the highest-ranking woman at Ukraine’s U.N. Mission, told the Security Council that the people of Mariupol have “been effectively taken hostage,” by the siege. Her voice shook with emotion as she described how a 6-year-old died shortly after her mother was killed by Russian shelling. “She was alone in the last moments of her life,” she said.

Authorities in Mariupol planned to start digging mass graves for all the dead. The shelling has shattered buildings, and the city has no water, heat, working sewage systems or phone service.

With the electricity out, many people are relying on their car radios for information, picking up news from stations broadcast from areas controlled by Russian forces or Russian-backed separatists.

Ludmila Amelkina, who was walking along an alley strewn with rubble and walls pocked by gunfire, said the destruction had been devastating.

“We don’t have electricity, we don’t have anything to eat, we don’t have medicine. We’ve got nothing,” she said, looking skyward.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Pentagon: Poland's jet offer 'not tenable'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/poland-offers-fighter-jets-us-plan-ukraine-83326409
GIST	<p>WARSAW, Poland -- The Pentagon on Tuesday rejected Poland's surprise announcement that it would give the United States its MiG-29 fighter jets for use by Ukraine, a rare display of disharmony by NATO allies seeking to boost Ukrainian fighters while avoiding getting caught up in a wider war with Russia.</p> <p>Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said Poland's declaration that it intended to deliver the 28 jets to the U.S. Ramstein Air Base in Germany raised the concerning prospect of warplanes departing from a U.S. and NATO base to fly into airspace contested with Russia in the Ukraine conflict.</p>

“We will continue to consult with Poland and our other NATO allies about this issue and the difficult logistical challenges it presents, but we do not believe Poland’s proposal is a tenable one,” Kirby said in a statement.

The proposed gift of more warplanes would be a morale booster for Ukrainians under pounding Russian assault for nearly two weeks. But it also raises the risk of the war expanding beyond Ukraine.

Russia has declared that supporting Ukraine’s air force would be tantamount to joining the war, and could spur retaliation.

White House officials were blindsided by the Polish announcement on the MiGs. The proposal did not come up during talks with Secretary of State Antony Blinken when he was recently in Poland, according to a U.S. official familiar with the talks.

The U.S. official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said White House officials did not think the proposal would easily solve the logistical challenges of providing aircraft to Ukraine.

U.S. Undersecretary of State Victoria Nuland told lawmakers at a hearing on the Ukraine crisis Tuesday she learned of Poland’s plans only while driving to the hearing.

“To my knowledge, it wasn’t pre-consulted with us,” Nuland told senators.

Ukraine has been pleading for more warplanes as it resists mightier Russian forces. Washington has been looking at a proposal under which Poland would supply Ukraine with the MiG-29s and in turn receive American F-16s to make up for their loss. Ukrainian pilots are trained to fly the Soviet-era fighter jets.

The Polish Foreign Ministry announced the plan in a statement, which said the jets would be delivered to Ramstein free of charge.

“At the same time, Poland requests the United States to provide us with used aircraft with corresponding operational capabilities,” it said.

The Polish government also appealed to other owners of MIG-29 jets to follow suit.

Former Soviet-bloc NATO members Bulgaria and Slovakia also still have Soviet-made fighter jets in their air forces.

Poland publicly floated its plan the day before Vice President Kamala Harris is scheduled to depart for Warsaw for talks with Polish officials. The disconnect is likely to add an awkward layer to the talks, which were expected to focus largely on U.S. efforts to help Poland and other eastern European nations that have taken in some 2 million refugees since the war started.

Additional air-defense capabilities are the No. 1 priority for Ukraine’s military right now, the country’s defense attache in Washington, Maj. Gen. Borys Kremenetskyi, told The Associated Press on Tuesday after returning from a meeting at the Pentagon. “It can be ground-based air-defense systems. It can be fighter jets, whatever possible,” he said.

Ukraine also needs additional anti-tank, anti-armor weapons and coastal defense capabilities to defend against Russian ships in the south, he said.

The handover of Poland’s 28 Soviet-made MiG-29s would signal Western resolve to do more for Ukraine. Militarily, however, the number of planes offered would make it unlikely to be a game-changer. And MiG-29s are inferior to more sophisticated Russian aircraft and could be easy prey for Russian pilots and Russian missiles.

A senior U.S. defense official has said Ukrainians are flying relatively few of their existing aircraft, for relatively little time, as it is. The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the U.S. assessment, said it's possible that Ukraine does not need more planes and would benefit most from more of the weapons it uses effectively every day, including anti-aircraft Stinger and anti-tank Javelin missiles.

The official also said that Russia currently has the capacity to reach almost the entire country of Ukraine with its surface-to-air missiles, including from within Russia and from ships in the Black Sea.

Any MiG transfer is fraught with complications. Neither NATO nor the European Union wants to be seen as directly involved in such a transaction, which would sharply raise already extreme tensions with Russia.

In order to maintain the pretense that NATO and the EU are not direct participants in the Ukraine conflict, U.S. and Polish officials have been considering a variety of options. One begins with the “donation” of Poland’s MiGs to the United States, as Poland announced on Tuesday.

Under one scenario, Poland would deliver the fighter jets to the U.S. base in Germany, where they would be repainted and flown to a non-NATO, non-EU country. Ukrainian pilots would then come to fly them to Ukraine.

No country has been publicly identified as a transit point, but Kosovo, a non-aligned country that is very friendly with the United States, has been mentioned as one of several nations that might be willing to serve as a middle point.

Poland’s proposed gift would also weaken Poland’s own air force at a time of heightened danger in eastern Europe.

Poland had been asking for the U.S. to provide it with F-16 fighter jets to replace the MiGs.

F-16 production is backlogged, however, and the next recipient in line for new deliveries is Taiwan, which is facing renewed threats from China and has strong support from both parties in Congress.

In its statement, the Polish government specifically asked for “used” planes, a distinction that would allow the Biden administration to bypass congressional opposition to making Taiwan wait to receive its F-16s.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said any decision about delivering offensive weapons must be made unanimously by NATO members.

“This is why we are able to give all of our fleet of jet fighters to Ramstein. But we are not ready to make any moves on our own because ... we are not a party to this war,” he said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell said Tuesday that he believed the aid that Congress hopes to approve later this week for Ukraine will include loan guarantees to help NATO allies replenish their air forces after giving MiGs to Ukraine.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 European ‘double-standard’ on refugees?
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/europes-unified-ukrainian-refugees-exposes-double-standard-nonwhite/story?id=83251970
GIST	<p>Before Russian attacks on Ukraine led to mass displacement, Europe was already grappling with the Syrian refugee crisis – an issue that had bitterly divided European Union nations in recent years over what to do with the 1.1 million Syrians who sought refuge in Europe.</p> <p>Meanwhile, neighboring European nations have swiftly met the influx of more than 2 million Ukrainian refugees since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24 with a united show of solidarity.</p>

Although it is unclear if disagreements over burden-sharing will follow, according to those who study migration in Europe, experts say Ukrainian refugees face a more welcoming environment because they are white.

Andrew Geddes, Director of the Migration Policy Centre, told ABC News that there's a stark contrast between Europe's "very warm welcome" of Ukrainian refugees, compared to the largely "hostile" response to Syrians and other asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East.

"It's night and day," Geddes said.

"I think the strongest contrast is with a bunch of central European countries that were very hostile to Syrian refugees, and are now quite much more favorable to Ukrainian refugees," Geddes added, referencing Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic – European Union members that were "the most resistant" to welcoming Syrian refugees.

Meanwhile, many nonwhite refugees fleeing Ukraine, including students from Asia and Africa, have reported instances of discrimination on the borders of Ukraine, with some telling ABC News that differential treatment based on race led to difficulties in crossing into countries like Poland. But others from Africans and the Middle East have said they crossed into Poland without any issues.

United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees Filippo Grandi confirmed during a press conference last Tuesday that "there are instances" of differentiation of treatment at the borders based on race, but said he was assured that "these are not state policies."

Grandi said he met with Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau last Wednesday, who "affirmed Poland's commitment to continue receiving all those fleeing, without distinction." Meanwhile, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba responded to reports of discrimination last Tuesday, tweeting that "Ukraine's government spares no effort to solve the problem." He also added that Ukraine set up an emergency hotline to assist African, Asian and other students seeking to leave Ukraine.

'Exclusionary' asylum policies

European countries host over 1 million of the 6.6 million Syrian asylum-seekers and refugees, but the vast majority are hosted by only two countries – 59% in Germany and 11% in Sweden, according to United Nations High Commission on Refugees data.

But according to Kelly Petillo, coordinator of the Middle East and North Africa programme and the European Council on Foreign Relations, this "didn't come immediately."

"It came after quite a bit of internal back and forth and lack of disagreement," Petillo said, adding that the majority of Syrian refugees were allowed to enter Europe in 2016 -- four years after the war in Syria began -- only after the European Union struck a deal with Turkey, which was facing immense pressure at the time from the surge of migrants and asylum seekers.

The Europe Union provided financial support to Turkey to slow the flow of migrants and asylum seekers crossing into Europe by returning "irregular migrants" attempting to enter Europe through Greece to Turkey, as Turkey works "to prevent new migratory routes from opening," according to the Migration Policy Centre.

As part of the deal, which was intended to slow migration to Europe, "the European Union agreed to resettle Syrian refugees from Turkey on a one-to-one basis," per MPC, and the European Union also paid 6 billion euros to aid Turkey's Syrian migrant communities.

"Since the Syria crisis erupted more than 10 years ago, we've seen that there was a high level of reluctance from Europeans to share the burden amongst themselves," Petillo said.

Austria, Greece, the Netherlands and France host between 2 to 5% of Syrian refugees in Europe, and other countries host below 2%, according to UNHCR.

Some of the Eastern European countries that largely rejected Syrian refugees have been at the forefront of welcoming Ukrainians, Geddes said, pointing to Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

"For migrants from outside of Europe ... it's a very, very powerful, exclusionary approach," Geddes said.

"The EU is much more willing to internalize a refugee situation where the people who are being forced to flee are white Europeans, and has been much more reluctant to offer protection for people who are from Africa and the Middle East," he added.

And that "double standard," Petillo said, is not only shaped by race, religion and culture, but also by politics.

Poland received 1.2 million of those fleeing Ukraine, according to UNHCR data, and on Friday Polish President Andrzej Duda toured a border crossing facility in Korczowa, where he met with Ukrainian refugees and told reporters that Poland would welcome them with open hearts.

Geddes said that Poland's handling of the Syrian refugee crisis was the "opposite."

As Poland continued to push back against pressure from the European Union to take in asylum seekers from Syria, Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of Poland's rightwing party and current Deputy Prime Minister, argued in 2017 that doing so would be "dangerous" and would "completely change our culture and radically lower the level of safety in our country."

The European Union's top court ruled in April 2020 that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic broke EU law by refusing to host refugees to relieve some of the burden from countries like Turkey and Greece.

And in November 2021, Poland was "involved in a military standoff" with Belarus to prevent asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East from crossing the Polish border, Geddes said.

More than 2,000 people were trapped in a makeshift camp on the Belarusian side as Poland blocked aid. At least 15 died in the cold last year.

And in January, Poland began building a metal wall on the border of Belarus to block migrants.

"When it comes down to it, Ukrainians are seen as European," Geddes said, saying that there are "very strong" historical and cultural links between Poland and Ukraine -- Many refugees from Ukraine have family and friends in Poland who have taken them in.

Meanwhile, asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East "are fundamentally seen as being different, racially, socially, culturally," he added.

Islamophobia and politics

Those sentiments, which Petillo described as "othering," were evident over the past week in the rhetoric of several prominent political leaders and various Western media figures, who made controversial statements that went viral on social media.

One journalist described Ukrainians as "civilized" in an attempt to differentiate them from other refugees and others suggested that it's more difficult to witness the plight of Ukrainians because they "look like us."

"These people are intelligent, they are educated people," Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov said of Ukrainians earlier this week, according to The Associated Press. "... This is not the refugee wave we have

been used to, people we were not sure about their identity, people with unclear pasts, who could have been even terrorists."

And Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who declared, "we're letting everyone in," regarding Ukrainian refugees, has made an anti-immigration platform a central part of his reelection campaign, arguing that an influx of non-Christian migrants is a threat to the culture.

"We do not want to be an immigrant country," Orban said in January, according to The Associated Press.

In the wake of the global War on Terror following the 9/11 terror attacks, Petillo said that Islamophobic language that "linked terrorism to Islam" became common in a "dangerous" political discourse regarding refugees from the Middle East.

Geddes said those anti-immigrant sentiments have been weaponized by various leaders of "the radical right" in Europe and "played a part in this exclusionary approach to migration."

At the height of the refugee crisis in 2015, Czech President Milos Zeman referred to the influx of Syrian and Iraqi refugees seeking asylum in Europe as "an organized invasion."

Meanwhile, the Czech Republic has so far welcomed tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees, per UNHCR.

Slovakia, which has so far taken in more than 140,000 Ukrainian refugees, per UNHCR data, said in 2015 that it would only accept Christians from Syria, according to The Associated Press.

According to Geddes, while other European countries were not as "explicit" as Slovakia in favoring Christians, they did so "implicitly" with their policies.

In a historic vote, the European Union agreed on Thursday to give Ukrainians immediate temporary protective status that allows them to work and live in EU countries and provides them with access to health care and other social services. This marks the first time that the EU has invoked this protection since it became a part of EU law two decades ago, Geddes said.

Although Germany and Sweden have made some efforts to provide protections for Syrian refugees, many remain "stuck in limbo" without access to employment, education or other social services, Petillo said.

"[They're] not coming out officially with policies saying we want Syrians to return, but they're doing anything they can to disincentivize Syrian refugees from staying," Petillo said, adding that ongoing humanitarian crises have led to an ongoing flow of refugees to Europe.

Since 2014, more than 20,000 asylum seekers from the Middle East, Asia and Africa arriving to the Mediterranean by land or by sea in hopes of crossing into Europe have died – some drowning – or gone missing, per UNHCR data, including 154 so far in 2022.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 CIA director: Putin 'angry, frustrated'
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/putin-angry-frustrated-cia-director-double-ukraine/story?id=83318093
GIST	<p>Top U.S. intelligence agency officials on Tuesday offered a sobering assessment of Russian President Vladimir Putin's objectives in Ukraine, and how the invasion could affect the safety and security of the United States.</p> <p>"The [Intelligence Community], as you know, provided warning of President Putin's plans, but this is a case where I think all of us wish we had been wrong," Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines told the House Intelligence Committee at its annual hearing on worldwide threats.</p>

Russia's failure to rapidly seize Kiev and overwhelm Ukrainian forces has deprived Moscow of the quick military victory they probably had originally expected would prevent the United States and NATO from being able to provide meaningful military aid to Ukraine."

Adding that the U.S. is seeing an "ill-constructed plan, morale issues and considerable logistical issues" among Russian troops, Haines said it is "unclear" whether Russia will pursue a plan to capture all of Ukraine, but that it's already loosening its rules of engagement.

"Russian forces are at the very least operating with reckless disregard for the safety of noncombatants, as Russian units launch artillery and airstrikes into urban areas as they have done in cities across Ukraine and near critical infrastructures such as the nuclear plant, and the IC is engaged across the interagency to document and hold Russia and Russian actors accountable for their actions," she said.

"We assess Putin feels aggrieved. The West has not given proper deference and perceives this as a war he cannot afford to lose," Haines said.

CIA Director William Burns, a former U.S. ambassador to Moscow who has studied Putin for years, concurred that the Russian president is "angry and frustrated" by the situation in Ukraine, and will likely step up his efforts.

"He's likely to double down and try to grind down the Ukrainian military with no regard for civilian casualties," Burns testified. "He has no sustainable political endgame in the face of what is going to continue to be fierce resistance from Ukrainians."

"Putin has commented privately and publicly over the years that he doesn't believe Ukraine's a real country," Burns continued. "He's dead wrong about that -- real countries fight back. And that's what the Ukrainians have done quite heroically over the last 12 days."

"I think he's been unsettled by the Western reaction and allied resolve particularly some of the decisions the German government has taken. I think he's been unsettled by the performance of his own military," he said. "The big countries don't get to swallow up small countries just because they can."

He called Putin's actions in the past two weeks "premeditated and savage."

Asked about Putin's mental state, Burns did not answer directly, but did say Putin's views on Ukraine have "hardened over the years."

"I think he's far more insulated from other points of view and people who would challenge or question his views in but in my opinion that doesn't make him crazy, but it makes them extremely difficult to deal with because of the hardening of his views over time and a narrowing of his inner circle," he said.

National Security Agency Director Gen. Pauli Nakasone said the U.S. had gamed out scenarios for a Russian cyberattack.

"We have to get better, we have to harden our infrastructure and have ability to be resilient," he said.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Pentagon: Russia forces intact; Kyiv push
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/95-putins-forces-intact-plan-surround-kyiv-pentagon/story?id=83317142
GIST	<p>The Pentagon has been providing daily updates on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Ukraine's efforts to resist.</p> <p>Here are highlights of what a senior U.S. defense official told reporters on Tuesday:</p> <p>Russian forces mostly still intact</p>

Nearly all Russian forces arrayed at the Ukrainian border for the invasion have now gone in, according to the official. Despite losing troops, ground vehicles and aircraft in the fighting, the official estimated these forces remain roughly 95% intact.

Russian ground efforts stalled in the north

Russian troops approaching Kyiv have made little progress in recent days, according to the official. "We continue to see Ukrainian resistance efforts slow down the Russians, particularly in the north," the official said.

Another factor is that "they still seem to be plagued by logistics and sustainment challenges," including fuel and food shortages, the official said.

The Pentagon also continues to see fighting and resistance against the Russian advance in the northern cities of Chernihiv and Kharkiv.

The farthest the main Russian force heading to Kyiv seems to have been able to reach is Hostomel Airport, a site of intense combat some 20 miles northwest of the city.

But their intent is clear, the official said: "We still have every reason to assess that their effort is to encircle and force the surrender of Kiev."

A new Russian approach emerges

Further out than those advance troops, a Russian push toward the capital is emerging in the northeast, just above the town of Sumy, the official said. These troops are roughly 37 miles from Kyiv.

Russians try to "sow fear and confusion" in the city

While the main invading force has not reached Kyiv, the official was in "no position to refute" reports of minor, isolated skirmishes between Russian "reconnaissance elements" and Ukrainian forces inside the city.

"We think that these reports of street fighting in Kyiv are really the result of their efforts to sow fear and confusion and and try to set the stage for what could be coming later," the official said.

Strikes on civilians continue

Russian air and missile attacks are increasing as their ground effort has been frustrated, according to the official.

"Whether intentionally or not, they're hitting military and government infrastructure as well as residential areas and civilian targets," the official said.

Russians see more success in the south

Russian troops advancing to the northwest out of Crimea are about 25 miles from Mykolayiv, the official said. The official noted that while there is speculation that the move on Mykolayiv is meant to put troops in position to attack the port city of Odessa from the north as amphibious troops assault from the coast, "we don't see any evidence of amphibious landings" at this point.

On the Sea of Azov coast, Russian forces have isolated Mariupol and continue to bombard it with long-range attacks. Thousands of troops put ashore in an amphibious landing on the second day of the invasion are approaching the city from the southwest as more troops push down from Donetsk.

U.S.-Russia deconfliction line in working order

Last week Pentagon press secretary John Kirby announced it had set up a "deconfliction line" with Russia to "reduce the chances of miscalculations and try to bring down the tensions as that contested airspace over Ukraine now bumps up against NATO airspace."

	<p>The senior defense official said that as of Tuesday, the two countries have used the line about a dozen times, but so far only for test calls to make sure "somebody's picking up on the other end."</p> <p>A problem for any proposed no-fly zone</p> <p>"Much of the airspace of Ukraine, north and south, is under some umbrella of Russian surface-to-air missile capability," the official said.</p>
Return to Top	

Cyber Awareness

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	03/09 Executive order on cryptocurrency
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-cryptocurrency-biden-technology-business-7af1d9bfda2d22046547fd9d51711ef5
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed an executive order on government oversight of cryptocurrency that urges the Federal Reserve to explore whether the central bank should jump in and create its own digital currency.</p> <p>The Biden administration views the explosive popularity of cryptocurrency as an opportunity to examine the risks and benefits of digital assets, said a senior administration official who previewed the order Tuesday on the condition of anonymity, terms set by the White House.</p> <p>Under the executive order, Biden also has directed the Treasury Department and other federal agencies to study the impact of cryptocurrency on financial stability and national security.</p> <p>Brian Deese and Jake Sullivan, Biden's top economic and national security advisers, respectively, said the order establishes the first comprehensive federal digital assets strategy for the United States.</p> <p>"That will help position the U.S. to keep playing a leading role in the innovation and governance of the digital assets ecosystem at home and abroad, in a way that protects consumers, is consistent with our democratic values and advances U.S. global competitiveness," Deese and Sullivan said Wednesday in a joint statement.</p> <p>The action comes as lawmakers and administration officials are increasingly voicing concern that Russia may be using cryptocurrency to avoid the impact of sanctions imposed on its banks, oligarchs and oil industry due to the invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>Last week, Democratic Sens. Elizabeth Warren, Mark Warner, and Jack Reed asked the Treasury Department to provide information on how it intends to inhibit cryptocurrency use for sanctions evasion.</p> <p>The Biden administration has argued that Russia won't be able to make up for the loss of U.S. and European business by turning to cryptocurrency. Officials said the Democratic president's order had been in the works for months before Russia's Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine last month.</p> <p>Daleep Singh, a deputy national security and economic adviser to Biden, told CNN on Wednesday that "crypto's really not a workaround for our sanctions."</p> <p>The executive order had been widely anticipated by the finance industry, crypto traders, speculators and lawmakers who have compared the cryptocurrency market to the Wild West.</p> <p>Despite the risks, the government said, surveys show that roughly 16% of adult Americans — or 40 million people — have invested in cryptocurrencies. And 43% of men age 18-29 have put their money into cryptocurrency.</p>

Coinbase Global Inc., the largest cryptocurrency exchange in the United States, said the company had not seen a recent surge in sanctions evasion activity.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said last week that “many participants in the cryptocurrency networks are subjected to anti-money laundering sanctions” and that the industry is not “completely one where things can be evaded.”

As for the Federal Reserve getting involved with digital assets, the central bank issued a paper in January that said a digital currency “would best serve the needs” of the country through a model in which banks or payment firms create accounts or digital wallets.

Some participants in digital currency welcome the idea of more government involvement with crypto.

Adam Zarazinski, CEO of Inca Digital, a crypto data company that does work for several federal agencies, said the order presents the opportunity to provide “new approaches to finance.”

“The U.S. has an interest in growing financial innovation,” Zarazinski said. He added that China and Russia were looking at crypto and building their own currency. More than 100 countries have begun or are piloting their own digital sovereign currency, according to the White House.

Katherine Dowling, general counsel for Bitwise Asset Management, a cryptocurrency asset management firm, said an executive order that provides more legal clarity on government oversight would be “a long term positive for crypto.”

But Hilary Allen, a financial regulation professor at American University, cautioned against moving too fast to embrace cryptocurrencies.

“I think crypto is a place where we should be putting the brakes on this innovation until it’s better understood,” she said. “As crypto becomes more integrated into our financial system it creates vulnerabilities not just to those who are investing in crypto but for everybody who participates in our economy.”

On Tuesday, the Treasury Department said its financial literacy arm would work to develop consumer-friendly materials to help people “make informed choices about digital assets.”

“History has shown that, without adequate safeguards, forms of private money have the potential to pose risks to consumers and the financial system,” said Nellie Liang, undersecretary for domestic finance.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 New method amplifies DDoS 4-billion-fold
SOURCE	https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2022/03/ddosers-use-new-method-capable-of-amplifying-traffic-by-a-factor-of-4-billion/
GIST	<p>Cybercriminals who use giant floods of data to knock sites offline are leveraging a never-before-seen method that has the potential to increase the damaging effects of those floods by an unprecedented 4 billion times, researchers warned on Tuesday.</p> <p>Like many other types of distributed denial-of-service attacks, the attacks send a modest amount of junk data to a misconfigured third-party service in a way that causes the service to redirect a much larger response at the intended target. So-called DDoS amplification attacks are popular because they lower the requirements needed to overwhelm their targets. Rather than having to marshal huge amounts of bandwidth and computing power, the DDoSer locates servers on the Internet that will do it for them.</p> <p>It’s all about amplification</p> <p>One of the oldest amplification vectors is misconfigured DNS servers, which increase DDoS volumes by about 54 times. New amplification routes have included the Network Time Protocol servers (about</p>

556x), [Plex media servers](#) (about 5x), [Microsoft RDP](#) (86x), and the [Connectionless Lightweight Directory Access Protocol](#) (at least 50x). Just last week, researchers described a [new amplification vector](#) that achieves a factor of at least 65.

Previously, the biggest known amplifier was [memcached](#), which has the potential to increase traffic by an astounding 51,000x.

The newest entrant is the Mitel MiCollab and MiVoice Business Express collaboration systems. Attackers have been using them for the past month to DDoS financial institutions, logistics companies, gaming companies, and organizations in other markets. A fleet of 2,600 servers is exposing an abusable system test facility in the software to the Internet through UDP port 10074, in a break with manufacturer recommendations that the tests be reachable only internally.

The current DDoS records stand at about [3.47 terabits per second](#) for volumetric attacks and roughly 809 million packets per second for exhaustion forms. Volumetric DDoSes work by consuming all available bandwidth either inside the targeted network or service or get between the target and the rest of the Internet. Exhaustion DDoSes, by contrast, overexert a server.

The new amplification vector provided by the misconfigured Mitel servers has the potential to shatter those records. The vector can do this not only because of the unprecedented 4 billion-fold amplification potential, but also because the Mitel systems can stretch out the attacks for lengths of time not previously possible.

“This particular attack vector differs from most UDP reflection/amplification attack methodologies in that the exposed system test facility can be abused to launch a sustained DDoS attack of up to 14 hours in duration by means of a single spoofed attack initiation packet, resulting in a record-setting packet amplification ratio of 4,294,967,296:1,” researchers from eight organizations wrote in a [joint advisory](#). “A controlled test of this DDoS attack vector yielded more than 400mpps of sustained DDoS attack traffic.”

A single abusable node generating this much amplification at a rate of 80 thousand packets per second can theoretically deliver the 14-hour data flood. Over that time, “counter” packets—which track the number of responses the servers send—would generate roughly 95.5GB of amplified attack traffic destined for the targeted network. Separate “diagnostic output” packets could account for an additional 2.5TB of attack traffic directed toward the target.

A single packet is all it takes

The Mitel MiCollab and MiVoice Business Express services act as a gateway for transferring PBX phone communications to the Internet and vice versa. The products include a driver for TP-240 VoIP processing interface cards. Customers can use a driver feature to stress-test the capacity of their internet networks. Mitel instructs customers to make the tests available only inside private networks rather than to the Internet as a whole, but about 2,600 servers have flouted that directive.

Mitel on Tuesday released [software updates](#) that will automatically ensure the test feature is available inside an internal network.

The DDoSers using this new method appear to still be experimenting with it, and so far the results are modest. The largest attack seen so far reached about 53Mpps and 23Gbps. The average packet size in that attack was about 60 bytes and lasted for roughly five minutes. The researchers said that, with refinements, these in-the-wild DDoSes could achieve the unprecedented amplification factors achieved in their lab experiments.

In the advisory, the researchers wrote:

As previously mentioned, amplification via this abusable test facility differs substantially from how it is accomplished with most other UDP reflection/amplification DDoS vectors. Typically, reflection/amplification attacks require the attacker to continuously transmit malicious payloads to

abusable nodes for as long as they wish to attack the victim. In the case of TP-240 reflection/amplification, this continuous transmission is not necessary to launch high-impact DDoS attacks. Instead, an attacker leveraging TP-240 reflection/amplification can launch a high-impact DDoS attack using a single packet. Examination of the tp240dvr binary reveals that, due to its design, an attacker can theoretically cause the service to emit 2,147,483,647 responses to a single malicious command. Each response generates two packets on the wire, leading to some 4,294,967,294 amplified attack packets being directed toward the attack victim.

For each response to a command, the first packet contains a counter which increments with each response that is sent. As the counter value increments, the size of this first packet will grow from 36 bytes to 45 bytes. The second packet contains diagnostic output from the function, which can be influenced by the attacker. By optimizing each initiator packet to maximize the size of the second packet, every command will result in amplified packets that are up to 1,184 bytes in length.

In theory, a single abusable node generating the upper limit of 4,294,967,294 packets at a rate of 80kpps would result in an attack duration of roughly 14 hours. Over the course of the attack, the “counter” packets alone would generate roughly 95.5GB of amplified attack traffic destined for the targeted network. The maximally padded “diagnostic output” packets would account for an additional 2.5TB of attack traffic directed towards the target.

This would yield a sustained flood of just under 393mb/sec of attack traffic from a single reflector/amplifier, all resulting from a single spoofed attack initiator packet of only 1,119 bytes in length. This results in a nearly unimaginable amplification ratio of 2,200,288,816:1— a multiplier of 220 billion percent, triggered by a single packet.

There’s not much end users can do to protect themselves from this new form of DDoSes. Rather, it’s up to organizations deploying Mitel servers to configure them properly. The advisory—written by researchers from Akamai SIRT, Cloudflare, Lumen Black Lotus Labs, Mitel, Netscout Arbor ASERT, Telus, Team Cymru, and the Shadowserver Foundation—provides other measures organizations can follow.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 FinCEN: ransom proceeds mix in sanctions
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/ransomware-sanctions-evasion-red-flags-fincen/
GIST	<p>As banks and other financial institutions work to honor the U.S. sanctions against Russia and monitor for efforts to evade them, the feds are warning that ransomware proceeds could be in the mix.</p> <p>The Treasury Department’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) issued guidance this week on the responsibility that private institutions have for detecting “sanctions evasion activity” and reporting it under the Bank Secrecy Act and other laws.</p> <p>The alert comes as federal lawmakers have expressed concern about the use of crypto to evade sanctions, and Bloomberg is reporting that the Biden administration is preparing an executive order on the topic this week.</p> <p>At least one big player in the cryptocurrency industry, the trading platform Coinbase, already has expressed a commitment to supporting sanctions from the U.S. and other nations looking to punish Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Coinbase said it had blocked 25,000 accounts linked to Russian people or entities.</p> <p>The FinCEN document lists 13 “red flags” for transactions involving what FinCEN calls “convertible virtual currency,” essentially cryptocurrencies like bitcoin or ethereum. Three of the red flags directly apply to suspicious activity that can signify the laundering of ransomware proceeds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attempts to “break the chain of custody” on the currency by initiating multiple, rapid trades across several types of digital coins, “with no apparent related purpose, followed by a transaction off the platform.”• Transfers of funds involving a “mixing service” — essentially a third-party organization that pools currencies together in a way that hides where they came from.

- Activity that exposes an institution, directly or indirectly, to transactions already identified by blockchain tracing software as being related to ransomware.

FinCEN said institutions should “quickly report suspicious activity associated with potential sanctions evasion, and conduct appropriate risk-based customer due diligence or, where required, enhanced due diligence.”

Cryptocurrency-tracking company Chainalysis noted that the alert is important “because Russian cybercriminals play an outsized role in overall ransomware activity, and some Russian ransomware organizations have already voiced their intent to aid Russia in its war efforts.”

Earlier this year, Chainalysis [noted the significant role of Moscow-based financial companies](#) in the crypto trade.

In outlining its response to the sanctions, Coinbase argued that cryptocurrencies “have properties that naturally deter common approaches to sanctions evasion,” because “digital asset transactions are traceable, permanent, and public.”

Changpeng Zhao, the founder of trading platform Binance, [argued last week](#) that “crypto is too small for Russia,” given the relatively low rate of adoption around the world.

Ransomware continues to be an attractive target for cybercrime groups with known Russian connections. After a recent disruption, [the Conti gang reportedly bounced back](#) and is hitting new targets with malware and ransom demands.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Oklahoma hospital data breach
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/oklahoma-hospital-data-breach/
GIST	<p>A security incident at a nonprofit community hospital in Oklahoma may have exposed the personal data of more than 92,000 individuals.</p> <p>Duncan Regional Hospital (DRH) found access to some of its systems mysteriously blocked on January 20 2022. The hospital disconnected all its systems from external access and notified law enforcement.</p> <p>DRH triggered its cybersecurity incident response plan and hired an independent forensics firm to determine what had happened, how it had occurred and whether any sensitive information may have been impacted.</p> <p>Although DRH was able to bring all systems back to normal operations within 24 hours, the investigating firm found that patient information and employee information may have been exposed during the incident.</p> <p>A security notice, submitted to the attorney general of Maine on March 4 by law firm Clark Hill on behalf of DRH, stated that the impacted data might include patients' name, date of birth, Social Security number, limited treatment information and medical appointment information such as date of service and name of providers.</p> <p>"For employees, this includes personal information associated with W-2s, such as name, date of birth, address, and Social Security number," stated the notice.</p> <p>The data breach was reported as an "external system breach (hacking)" incident affecting 92,398 individuals.</p>

[KnowBe4](#) security awareness advocate, James McQuiggan, commented: "Cyber-criminals work to make money by selling data, which is stolen from the victims. Data breaches where they can steal names, social security numbers and email addresses are a good source of revenue."

[JupiterOne](#) CISO, Sounil Yu, commented that the value of a healthcare record is "pointedly higher" for cyber-criminals than the value of other information.

"The reason for this is that a healthcare record contains more PII than most other records," said Yu, "In addition, it enables attackers to defraud medical insurance and resell drugs purchased through the stolen identities."

Joseph Carson, chief security scientist and advisory CISO at [Delinea](#), said that data theft involving medical records was particularly irksome for victims.

"Unfortunately, for medical records, you cannot change your medical history. Once stolen or disclosed, it is public knowledge whereas a credit card you can change and get back on track quickly."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Identity theft statistics
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/identity-theft-statistics-you-need-know-in-2022/
GIST	<p>Over the past two years, cybersecurity has evolved at a break-neck pace, in step with the emergent cyber threats thriving during the pandemic. This evolution is likely to continue in 2022. Identity theft in particular has become a defining threat in the virtual sphere, as recent statistics highlight.</p> <p>Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, cybercrime has flourished, taking full advantage of the necessity of shifting business operations online in the context of remote work. According to a report by the US-based Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC), the first three quarters of 2021 saw a 17% rise in the number of businesses experiencing data breaches. These breaches are one of the prime sources of identity theft.</p> <p>Unsurprisingly, public awareness of the hazards of cybercrime has risen in parallel with its incidence. A recent survey found that for the majority of US respondents (87%), cybersecurity is a bigger concern for their future than either COVID-19 or the climate crisis.</p> <p>But to gain insights into where the level of threat from identity theft currently lies for consumers, what businesses can do about it, and how the cybersecurity market responds, it is first necessary to gain a comprehensive overview of the latest statistics. Here it is.</p> <p>Rising Incidence of Identity Theft</p> <p>One of the most comprehensive sources on identity theft in the US is the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Network (CSN). The CSN collects all complaints made to the FTC throughout the year. Each year, the FTC releases a CSN Data Book summarizing the actual complaints it received, which allows an analysis of trends grounded in fact rather than estimates, as many other sources do.</p> <p>Overall, FTC complaints jumped 46% from 2019 to 2020, a trend that likely continued in 2021. Identity theft is the main reason by far for FTC complaints, accounting for 29.39% of all cases.</p> <p>Other sources also indicate that identity thefts have increased sharply, both globally and in the US specifically. According to figures released by the Aite Group, 47% of US citizens experienced financial identity theft in 2021.</p> <p>The group's report further estimates that the total cost of damages related to identity theft increased by 42% between 2019 and 2020, rising from \$502.5 billion to \$712.4 billion in 2020. Furthermore, losses are expected to increase by another \$10 billion in 2021.</p>

Different Types of Identity Fraud

However, estimates of the frequency with which identity fraud happens in the US and abroad, as well as the financial impact it creates, vary considerably depending on how the term is delineated.

For instance, the 2021 Identity Fraud Study by fintech research company Javelin, cosponsored by Visa, draws a distinction between traditional identity fraud and identity fraud scams.

In the former, cybercriminals gain personally-identifying information (PII) indirectly, either through a breach or [dark web](#) data brokers.

In the latter, criminals directly contact their victims to extract information such as social security numbers, either via calls, text messages, or email, using various phishing techniques. This approach provides them with a low-effort, low-risk path to financial gain.

Overall, the study estimates that identity fraud cost Americans a total of [\\$56 billion](#) in 2021, with 49 million consumers becoming the victims of cybercriminals.

Statistical Consequences of Identity Theft

According to the 2021 [Aftermath Study](#) of the Identity Theft Resource Center, the impacts of identity theft on victims are severe. Almost a third (32%) of victims experienced finance-related issues. All of these were contacted by debt collectors, often aggressively, and 83% were turned down for credit or loans – which left many unable to rent an apartment or find housing.

A similarly high number (29%) reported problems related to government-issued personal credentials, such as state-issued drivers' licenses.

A further 10% of victims found themselves involved in criminal issues as a consequence of identity theft. 57% of these reported that their identity was used to commit a crime, with warrants for their arrest issued by law enforcement.

Finally, 8% of identity theft victims had issues related to medical treatments, receiving bills for services they never received.

Most damningly, the numbers also reveal that identity theft carries a large risk of recurrence. 29% of people filing complaints with the ITRC have been victims of identity theft in the past. Most people [can't tell if their identity has been stolen](#), and don't even know how to check. This is one reason why identity fraud is often recurring.

In general, younger people report losing money to fraud more frequently, with 44% of complaints being filed by people aged 20-29. However, their resulting median financial loss is far lower than that of people in older age groups (\$324 for ages 20-29 vs. \$1,300 for ages over 80).

Identity Theft Protection: A Dynamic Market Development

As a consequence of the developments outlined above, investing in identity theft protection has become a priority for many consumers and businesses alike. According to the [Global Identity and Fraud Report 2021](#) by Experian, 40% of US-based companies, and 47% of global businesses are prioritizing investments in advanced analytics and fraud detection software.

Globally, the identity theft protection services market size was [estimated at USD 8.94 billion in 2020](#). Throughout the year it grew by 12.9% over 2019. By the end of 2021, the market is expected to expand to 10.11 billion. By 2028, a market expansion to a total size of 24.90 billion is projected, at a CAGR of 13.7%.

[Return to Top](#)

SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/emotet-growing-slowly-but-steadily-since-november-resurgence/
GIST	<p>The notorious Emotet botnet is still being distributed steadily in the wild, having now infected 130,000 systems in 179 countries.</p> <p>While this may be a far cry from the once global dominance of having 1.6 million devices under its control, it shows that the malware is still undergoing a resurgence, and it's getting stronger every day.</p> <p>Emotet activity stopped in 2019 while its second major version was in circulation, and the malware returned only in November 2021, with the help of Trickbot.</p> <p>A few days later, it became evident that the revival was orchestrated by the Conti ransomware gang, who use it to gain initial access to corporate networks.</p> <p>Apart from the initial infection, Emotet continued to skip dropping TrickBot as a payload and went straight to dropping the Cobalt Strike pentesting tool for quick remote access to networks.</p> <p>Tracking the Emotet botnet</p> <p>Threat analysts at Black Lotus labs have decided to take a deeper dive into Emotet's "Epoch 3" to identify new features and map its current distribution patterns....</p> <p>The new Emotet campaign also includes features like a new elliptic curve cryptography (ECC) scheme that replaces the RSA encryption used for network traffic protection and validation.</p> <p>Moreover, the new version deploys a process list module only after the connection with the C2 has been established.</p> <p>Additionally, the malware authors have now added more info-gathering capabilities for better system profiling, whereas previously, Emotet would only send back a list of running processes.</p> <p>Slow and steady restructuring</p> <p>Black Lotus reports that there are currently 200 unique C2s supporting Emotet's resurgence, with the number growing slowly but steadily. The average number of days of activity for C2s is presently 29.</p> <p>Like in previous epochs, most of Emotet's C2 infrastructure is located in the United States and Germany, followed by France, Brazil, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Canada, the UK, and India.</p> <p>In terms of bot distribution, the focus is Japan, India, Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa, Mexico, United States, China, Brazil, and Italy.</p> <p>The threat analysts believe that the reason for the first three countries topping this list is the number of outdated and thus vulnerable Windows machines in the region.</p> <p>As Bleeping Computer reported in December, Emotet exploited a Windows AppX Installer spoofing vulnerability to install apps on the host directly from a remote source.</p> <p>Microsoft addressed the problem, tracked as CVE-2021-43890, with December 2021 Patch Tuesday, but due to slow upgrade uptick vs. the projected benefits of keeping the abused MSIX handler, the software giant decided to simply disable it.</p> <p>Still, pirated Windows copies that have purposefully severed their connectivity to Microsoft update servers remain vulnerable to malware attacks like Emotet's.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Twitter launches Tor website
----------	------------------------------------

SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/technology/twitter-launches-tor-website-to-tackle-russian-censorship/
GIST	<p>Twitter is now accessible over the Tor network, allowing users in countries that banned it to continue accessing the social network's site.</p> <p>The new onion URL was announced today by security engineer Alec Muffett who announced that Twitter can now be accessed worldwide via the Tor browser.</p> <p>Muffett told BleepingComputer that he wrote and helped deploy the software used to connect Twitter to the Tor network.</p> <p>The Tor Project allows you to download a customized Firefox browser that can be used to browse the web anonymously and access special .onion domains only accessible via Tor.</p> <p>The project is especially useful as it allows users to bypass government censorship and continue accessing sites that are normally blocked in their country.</p> <p>To access Twitter over Tor, you can download the Tor Browser and browse to the special special onion URL https://twitter3e4tixl4xyajtrzo62zg5vztmjuricldp2c5kshju4avyoid.onion/.</p> <p>Using Tor, Twitter can now be accessed even in countries where the government blocks access to the site. The launch of this project comes at a good time as Russia begins to isolate itself from the rest of the world. To prevent the free flow of information about the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia last week began blocking access to Twitter, Facebook, and foreign news outlets.</p> <p>With Twitter now being accessible via Tor, people in Russia can continue accessing the service and gaining information about the conflict and other worldwide events.</p> <p>Twitter is not alone in offering Tor onion URLs for their service. Other social sites and news outlets offering Tor URLs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BBC News in Ukrainian: https://www.bbcweb3hytmzhn5d532owbu6oqadra5z3ar726vq5kgwwn6aucdccrad.onion/ukrainian ▪ BBC News in Russian: https://www.bbcweb3hytmzhn5d532owbu6oqadra5z3ar726vq5kgwwn6aucdccrad.onion/russian ▪ BBC News internationally: https://www.bbcweb3hytmzhn5d532owbu6oqadra5z3ar726vq5kgwwn6aucdccrad.onion ▪ Deutsche Welle: https://www.dnewsngmhlplx602twtfjgnrnjxbegbwqx6wnotdhkzt562tszfid.onion/ ▪ Facebook: facebookwkhpilnemxj7asaniu7vnjibiltxjqhye3mhbshg7kx5tfyd.onion ▪ Radio Free Europe RFERL: https://www.rferlo2zxgv23tct66v45s5mecftol5vod3hf4rqbipfp46fqu2q56ad.onion/ ▪ The Intercept: https://27m3p2uv7igmj6kvd4ql3cct5h3sdwrsajovkkndeufumzyfhlfev4qd.onion ▪ The New York Times: https://www.nytimesn7cgmftshazwhfgzm37qxb44r64ytbb2dj3x62d2ljsctiyyd.onion/
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/09 Chinese phishing targets EU diplomats
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/chinese-phishing-actors-consistently-targeting-eu-diplomats/
GIST	The China-aligned group tracked as TA416 (aka Mustang Panda) has been consistently targeting European diplomats since August 2020, with the most recent activity involving refreshed lures to coincide with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

According to a new report by Proofpoint, TA416 spearheads cyber-espionage operations against the EU, consistently focusing on this long-term role without reaping opportunistic gains.

By keeping their tools and tactics essentially unchanged since 2020 and only refreshing their phishing themes and peripheral components, TA416 has made attribution simple for the analysts.

Timeline of activity

Starting in August 2020, the phishing actors impersonated EU-based organizations to target governments in the continent.

The malicious emails used a DropBox URL to deliver a variant of the PlugX malware, which was previously deployed in attacks [against Australian organizations](#).

In November 2021, TA416 added hidden [image trackers](#) on emails to validate message openings and follow a more targeted approach in their campaign.

On January 17, 2022, Proofpoint noticed new delivery attempts involving ZIP files that were custom-named to match the target's interests.

A change in tactic also occurred at this point, as the ZIP files weren't fetched from a cloud hosting service but instead leveraged a dropper malware executable.

The four components downloaded this way were the PlugX malware, its loader, the DLL search order hijacker (process loader), and a PDF decoy file.

Finally, on February 28, 2022, the Chinese threat actors were spotted using a compromised diplomat's address to target other top-ranking officials of NATO countries with lures involving the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The compromised person worked in refugee and migrant services, an area that was recently targeted by [Belarusian hackers](#) as well.

Superficial changes

While the tactics, malware drop, installation, and loading methods remain constant across campaigns, Mustang Panda puts some effort into regularly changing the components used.

"The group uses different legitimate PE files to initiate side-loading, as well as a variety of PlugX DLL loaders including the PotPlayer and DocCon versions," elaborates the [Proofpoint report](#).

"TA416 also uses different variants of the final PlugX payload in which the communication routines are observed to be different when closely analyzed."

However, too many elements form a common ground between 2020, 2021, and 2022 campaigns, as reflected in the following table.

	Tactic	2020 TA416 Campaigns	2021 – 2022 TA416 Campaigns
	Spoofing Via SMTP2Go	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Impersonation of UN Personnel	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Rudimentary Base64 Web Bugs	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Trident Loaded PlugX	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Politically Themed PDF Decoys	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Shared Zip and PDF Decoy File Names	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Targeted European Diplomatic Entities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Sharp rise in SMB attacks by Russia, China
SOURCE	https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2022/03/09/saas-security-events-smbs/?web_view=true
GIST	<p>SaaS Alerts unveiled the findings of its latest report which analyzed approximately 136 million SaaS security events across 2,100 small and medium businesses (SMBs) globally and identified cyber trends negatively impacting businesses.</p> <p>The findings of the report take into account security events occurring across more than 120,000 user accounts during the period of January 1st to December 31st, 2021 and shows that the vast majority of attacks on top SaaS platforms such as Microsoft 365, Google Workspace, Slack and Dropbox are originating from the countries of Russia and China. The data set is statistically significant and enables solution providers managing a portfolio of SaaS applications with pertinent data and trends to support defensive IT security re-alignments as required.</p> <p>Additionally, over the last several weeks, there has been a sharp rise in activity from countries with consistently high levels of both attempted and successful attacks originating within their borders — Russia and China. The vast volumes of data analyzed suggests these countries may even be coordinating attack efforts.</p> <p>Per analysis available, attack trend lines that compare Russia and China show almost the exact same pattern. Juxtaposed to a chart from Germany indicates that it is not even close to the same pattern, leading to educated speculation that these countries could be coordinating efforts.</p> <p>According to the Brookings Institute, “The U.S. National Security Strategy declares Russia and China the two top threats to U.S. national security. At the best of times, U.S.-Russia ties are a mixture of cooperation and competition, but today they are largely adversarial... Russia’s increasingly close relationship with China represents an ongoing challenge for the United States. While there is little that Washington can do to draw Moscow away from Beijing, it should not pursue policies that drive the two countries closer together, such as the trade war with China and rafts of sanctions against Russia.”</p> <p>SaaS security events analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> On average, there are approximately 10,000 brute force attacks per day against the user accounts. The origin of potential attacks can be traced back to specific countries with current data indicating that Attempted Unauthorized Logins are coming from actors located in China, Vietnam, Russia, Korea and Brazil. While successful unauthorized logins are originating in Russia, China, Vietnam, Korea and Brazil. These are countries where an actor has successfully logged-in using a valid user’s credentials. The report finds that the three most common critical SaaS application security alerts stem from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> User location outside approved location: An alert which is triggered when there’s a successful login to a user account from outside of an approved location or an approved IP address range.

- **SaaS integration:** Indicates that account credentials have been used to connect to a third-party application which may lead to data and other account information sharing between SaaS Apps. Users often establish these connections for convenience without consideration to potential security violations.
- **Multiple account lockouts:** Recorded when an account is locked out 4 or more times within a 12-hour period. Often indicating that malicious actors are actively (typically programmatically) trying password combinations to gain access to the account and have succeeded in validating a correct account name.

Other key findings from the report focus on common threat vectors that are putting SMBs at risk including a shocking ratio of guest user accounts (versus licensed accounts) being leveraged by SMBs with 42% of the over 129,000 monitored SaaS accounts being guest user accounts.

The report also identifies the top five third-party OAuth app Integrations being leveraged by SMB users and details a threat vector around risky file sharing behavior with 19% of cloud-based file sharing activity being to external sources versus internal file-sharing. Each of these activities pose a significant threat vector as they potentially open pathways for malicious attacks if not properly monitored and managed.

“In the uncertain cyber-climate we all reside in today, detailed SaaS security oversight and robust defenses are a requirement for ensuring high resiliency and business continuity,” said [Jim Lippie](#), CEO, SaaS Alerts. “The loss, theft or corruption of mission critical or sensitive customer data can be operationally and financially troublesome for SMBs that depend on continuous and unrestricted business operations to bolster revenues which have been the target of threat actors for years. We offer this useful threat level breakdown to assist businesses and the MSPs that support them with highly accurate insights about the security landscape they reside in.”

The security management and compliance of SaaS applications in use by SMBs today have become a greater concern for MSPs as the deployment of cyber defenses take center stage. Protection of both the SaaS application and data are critical and must receive SaaS-optimized security controls. Building a [security-minded employee culture](#) that centers on security controls, SaaS-native cyber defenses and procedural compliance can play a significant role in reducing the risk of a successful attack.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Firmware flaws in millions of HP devices
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/03/new-16-high-severity-uefi-firmware.html?&web_view=true
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity researchers on Tuesday disclosed 16 new high-severity vulnerabilities in various implementations of Unified Extensible Firmware Interface (UEFI) firmware impacting multiple HP enterprise devices.</p> <p>The shortcomings, which have CVSS scores ranging from 7.5 to 8.8, have been uncovered in HP's UEFI firmware. The variety of devices affected includes HP's laptops, desktops, point-of-sale (PoS) systems, and edge computing nodes.</p> <p>"By exploiting the vulnerabilities disclosed, attackers can leverage them to perform privileged code execution in firmware, below the operating system, and potentially deliver persistent malicious code that survives operating system re-installations and allows the bypass of endpoint security solutions (EDR/AV), Secure Boot and Virtualization-Based Security isolation," American firmware security company Binarly said in a report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>The most severe of the flaws concern a number of memory corruption vulnerabilities in the System Management Mode (SMM) of the firmware, thereby enabling the execution of arbitrary code with the highest privileges.</p>

Vulnerabilities	Number of Issues	BINARLY ID	CVE ID
SMM Callout (Privilege Escalation)	3	BRLY-2021-004 BRLY-2021-040 BRLY-2021-041	CVE-2021-39298 CVE-2022-23932 CVE-2022-23933
SMM Memory Corruption	9	BRLY-2021-032 BRLY-2021-033 BRLY-2021-034 BRLY-2021-035 BRLY-2021-036 BRLY-2021-037 BRLY-2021-038 BRLY-2021-039 BRLY-2021-042	CVE-2022-23924 CVE-2022-23925 CVE-2022-23926 CVE-2022-23927 CVE-2022-23928 CVE-2022-23929 CVE-2022-23930 CVE-2022-23931 CVE-2022-23934
DXE Memory Corruption	4	BRLY-2021-003 BRLY-2021-005 BRLY-2021-006 BRLY-2021-007	CVE-2021-39297 CVE-2021-39299 CVE-2021-39300 CVE-2021-39301

Following a coordinated disclosure process with HP and CERT Coordination Center (CERT/CC), the issues were addressed as part of a series of [security updates](#) shipped on February 2 and March 8, 2022.

"Unfortunately, most of the issues [...] are repeatable failures, some of which are due to the complexity of the codebase or legacy components that get less security attention, but are still widely used in the field," the researchers pointed out.

The disclosure arrives a little over a month after Binarly [publicized](#) the discovery of 23 high-impact vulnerabilities in Insyde Software's InsydeH2O UEFI firmware that could be weaponized to deploy persistent malware that's capable of evading security systems.

The latest findings are also significant in light of the fact that firmware has emerged as an ever-expanding attack surface for threat actors to launch highly-targeted devastating attacks. At least five different [firmware malware strains](#) have been detected in the wild to date since 2018.

"Securing the firmware layer is often overlooked, but it is a single point of failure in devices and is one of the stealthiest methods in which an attacker can compromise devices at scale," the U.S. Commerce and Homeland Security departments [highlighted](#) in a report published last month.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 China spies hacked livestock app
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/china-apt41-hacking-usaherds-log4j/
GIST	<p>THE WEB-BASED SOFTWARE known as the Animal Health Emergency Reporting Diagnostic System, or USAHERDS, serves as a helpful digital tool for state governments to track and trace animal disease through populations of livestock. Now it's turned out to be a kind of infection vector of its own—in the hands of one of China's most prolific groups of hackers.</p> <p>On Tuesday, the cybersecurity incident-response firm Mandiant revealed a long-running hacking campaign that breached at least six US state governments over the past year. Mandiant says the campaign, which it believes to have been the work of the notorious Chinese cyberespionage group APT41—also known as Barium, or as a part of the larger Chinese hacker group Winnti—used a vulnerability in USAHERDS to penetrate at least two of those targets. It may have hit many more, given that 18 states run USAHERDS on web servers, and any of those servers could have been commandeered by the hackers.</p> <p>APT41 has gained a reputation as one of China's most aggressive hacking groups. The US Department of Justice indicted five of its members in absentia in 2020 and accused them of hacking into hundreds of victims' systems across Asia and the West, both for state-sponsored espionage and for profit. The group's goal in this latest series of intrusions, or what data they may have been seeking, remains a mystery. But Mandiant analyst Rufus Brown says that it nonetheless shows just how active APT41 remains, and how inventive</p>

and thorough it's been searching for any toehold that might allow them into yet another set of targets—even an obscure livestock management tool most Americans have never heard of.

“It's very unnerving to see this group *everywhere*,” says Brown. “APT41 is going after any external-facing web application that can give them access to a network. Just very persistent, very continuous targeting.”

Late last year, Mandiant warned the developer of USAHERDS, a Pennsylvania-based company called Acclaim Systems, of a [high-severity hackable bug in the app](#). The app encrypts and signs the data sent between PCs and the server running it using keys that are meant to be unique to every installation. Instead, the keys were hard-coded into the application, meaning they were the same for every server that ran USAHERDS. That meant that any hacker who learned the hard-coded key values—as Mandiant believes APT41 did during its reconnaissance of another, earlier victim's network—could manipulate data sent from a user's PC to the server to exploit another bug in its code, allowing the hacker to run their own code on the server at will. Mandiant says Acclaim Systems has since patched the USAHERDS vulnerability. (WIRED reached out to Acclaim Systems but didn't receive a response.)

USAHERDS is hardly the only web app APT41 appears to have hacked as a way into its victims' systems. Based on a series of incident response cases over the last year, Mandiant believes that the Chinese group has since at least May of last year been targeting US state governments by exploiting web applications that use a development framework called ASP.NET. At first, the group appears to have used a vulnerability in two such web apps, which Mandiant declined to name, to hack into two US state governments. Each of those apps was used solely by one of the two state agencies, Mandiant says.

But the next month, and continuing through the end of 2021, Mandiant saw the hackers move on to target USAHERDS as another means of entry. APT41 hacked USAHERDS first as way into one of the two state governments it had already targeted, and then to breach a third. Mandiant hasn't confirmed that the same vulnerability was used to hack any other victims. Starting in December, Mandiant found that APT41 moved on to exploiting the [widely publicized vulnerability in Log4j, the commonly used Apache logging framework](#), using it to breach at least two other US state governments.

Mandiant nonetheless chose to reveal the exploitation of USAHERDS in the two earlier breaches due to the broad use of the app across state governments, the severity of the bug, and the likelihood that it was also used to quietly penetrate other state networks. “There are 18 states that use USAHERDS. If you're APT41, why not exploit all of them?” says Mandiant's Brown. “We don't know how broad this is. We just really want to get the information out there.”

Once it had access to a server on a target network, APT41 would advance using relatively common “credential harvesting” tools, such as the [Mimikatz](#) technique of accessing passwords in a machine's memory and then using them to gain access to other computers on the network. It then planted backdoor code in victim computers that allowed it broad, ongoing access to the state governments' networks. The group used malware and infrastructure that Mandiant says it clearly recognized as that of APT41, including tools with names like KEYPLUG, DEADEYE, and DUSTPAN.

The half-dozen US state governments that Mandiant has highlighted join a massive list of APT41's targets over the last several years, from the US, France, Australia, the United Kingdom, and Chile to a dozen Asian countries. The group, which the Department of Justice has [linked to a Chengdu, China-based company called Chengdu 404 Network Technology](#), has carried out an unusual mix of espionage-focused hacking—seemingly in the service of the Chinese government—and for-profit hacking, from stealing virtual video game currency to ransomware.

But APT41 may be most remarkable for its inventive approaches to gaining access to large numbers of target networks, which are often far more unique and stealthy than the simple [phishing](#) or [password-spraying](#) used by some groups. Over several years, for instance, the group carried out a [series of software supply chain hijacking operations](#), gaining access to software developers' systems to plant their code in legitimate applications like the software updates of laptop maker Asus, the hard-drive cleanup tool CCleaner, and Netsarang, a Korean-made enterprise remote management tool.

	<p>The group's more recent targeting of niche web applications like USAHERDS represents another example of its relatively arcane methods. "They're very creative," says Brown. "They have high operational capability to really perform these large-scale campaigns."</p> <p>The lesson for developers, it seems, is that no app is too obscure to be a target for a determined adversary. Your code may just be designed for monitoring cows. But that doesn't mean state-sponsored cyberspies aren't monitoring your code.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Gaming industry unites to cutoff Russia
SOURCE	https://www.wired.com/story/gaming-industry-unites-russia/
GIST	<p>LAST WEEK, THE Ukrainian government put out a public call to “all game development companies” to “temporarily block all Russian and Belorussian accounts” in response to Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine. Now, after a slow start, many of the game industry's major players are heeding that call and cutting off new sales in the country.</p> <p>French mega-publisher Ubisoft became the latest game company to take action against Russian customers Monday morning, telling Bloomberg that it is “suspending its physical and digital sales” in the Russian market. Take-Two announced a similar move earlier in the morning, telling Mashable that it is stopping “new sales, installations, and marketing support” in Russia and Belarus, including purchases made through the Rockstar Game Launcher.</p> <p>The new announcements come after a flurry of similar actions taken by large game publishers over the weekend. Activision Blizzard announced late Friday that it will be cutting off game sales and offering a two-to-one match on employee contributions to relief organizations operating in Ukraine.</p> <p>Electronic Arts also announced Friday that it is halting Russian game sales, including the sale of virtual currency bundles in its popular games, “while this conflict continues.” That action comes after EA Sports earlier removed all Russian teams from FIFA 22 and NHL 22, mirroring similar moves from international organizations managing those sports.</p> <p>Mixed Responses From Platform Holders</p> <p>On the platform level, Poland's CD Projekt Red was among the first major game companies to block the Russian market, cutting it off from purchases on the GOG online store last week. “We know that players in Russia and Belarus, individuals who have nothing to do with the invasion of Ukraine, will be impacted by this decision, but with this action we wish to further galvanize the global community to speak about what is going on in the heart of Europe,” the company wrote.</p> <p>By Friday morning, Microsoft joined in by barring Russian sales of all products, including Xbox hardware, software, and Game Pass subscriptions.</p> <p>On Saturday, Epic joined the chorus by saying it was “stopping commerce with Russia in our games.” It's unclear if that ban extends to the Epic Games Store or development clearinghouses like the Unreal Marketplace. Regardless, Epic says it will continue to allow Russian players to access its games, citing “the same reason other communication tools remain online: the free world should keep all lines of dialogue open.” (Most other companies mentioned here have allowed Russian accounts to continue to access prior purchases as well.)</p> <p>While other game platforms technically remain online and doing business in Russia, sanctions from major payment processors seem to be affecting access for game purchases on some online storefronts. A (translated) error message on Nintendo's Russian site notes that, “due to the fact that the payment service used in Nintendo eShop has suspended the processing of payments in rubles, Nintendo eShop in Russia is temporarily placed into maintenance mode.”</p>

	<p>Credit card payments are also unavailable on Steam, though Russian users can still reportedly use existing Steam wallet funds to make new purchases. PayPal purchases were also still working on Steam before that company cut off Russian service on Saturday.</p> <p>While Sony hasn't made any public statements regarding the Russian PlayStation market, <i>Gran Turismo Sport</i> was made unavailable to purchase on the Russian PlayStation store on Friday. That move comes as FIA Motorsports also takes action to prevent Russian participation in events, including esports.</p> <p>While Russia is a significant and growing market for major game publishers, the country doesn't even crack the top 10 nations by game industry revenues, according to a 2021 NewZoo report. In an investor note, CD Projekt Red noted that Russian and Belarusian customers accounted for 5.4 percent and 3.7 percent of the company's sales in the last 12 months, respectively.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/07 Ukraine's phone, internet still work
SOURCE	https://www.politico.com/news/2022/03/07/ukraine-phones-internet-still-work-00014487
GIST	<p>Cybersecurity experts expected Russian forces to take out at least some Ukrainian phone lines and internet services as part of a ground invasion. It hasn't happened — even though Russia appears to be suffering for it.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is addressing Ukrainians on his Telegram account. Ukrainian hackers are organizing against Russian forces. And ordinary Ukrainians are sharing on-the-ground photos and videos on social media detailing the impact of Russia's destruction.</p> <p>But cybersecurity and national security experts believe Russia has three good reasons to refrain from disabling phone and data networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Russian intelligence services can eavesdrop on phone calls and emails and also gather geolocation and other metadata. • The Russian army is using Ukrainian commercial networks to communicate. • Russian forces don't want to destroy infrastructure that they will need if they succeed in conquering Ukraine. <p>Listening in</p> <p>"If [Russian forces] can do localized shutdowns of telecommunications, they'll do it," said James Lewis, senior vice president and director of the strategic technologies program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "But in general, they'll want to keep the phones working in Kyiv because they can listen in."</p> <p>Ariel Parnes, a former top Israeli cyberintelligence official, agrees: "Imagine if you know the phone numbers of certain people or certain leadership or soldiers, troops. You can see the movement. You can see where the forces are concentrated."</p> <p>Russian attempts to penetrate Ukrainian networks have been made easier because the countries use similar technologies in their networks. Wired reported in 2012 both nations have required providers install a piece of surveillance technology that allows governments to tap phone lines and record calls.</p> <p>Furthermore, prior to the 2014 Crimea annexation, most of Ukraine's telecommunications providers were either owned by Russians or Russian-Ukrainian businesspeople, giving Moscow the opportunity to lean on the private sector for help infiltrating networks, said Chris Kubecka, a cyberwarfare specialist who traveled to Ukraine before the invasion to help a nuclear power facility prepare for Russian cyber threats.</p> <p>"It's easy to put surveillance on telecoms if you have a foothold," Kubecka said. "Now [the Russians] have blueprints, probably backdoors."</p> <p>Having that access could affect Russia's decision-making, Lewis said. "They're not asking, 'Can we get in?' They're asking, 'Is it better for us to let it keep working and use it, or to shut it off?'"</p>

Even before the invasion, Russian surveillance of Ukrainian telephone networks was pervasive. On numerous occasions, U.S. officials [have linked Russia](#) to [leaks of phone conversations](#) between Ukrainian political elites and Western officials. The old KGB building still stands tall in the center of Kyiv, serving as a permanent reminder of Moscow's reach within Ukraine. Zelenskyy himself uses a secure satellite phone to communicate with U.S. officials, according to [a CNN report](#).

Hiding in plain sight

Meanwhile, rather than sticking to more secure, military communications lines, “the Russians themselves are using the local telecoms networks — and more widely, the local communications infrastructure as well — as they do their operations,” said Shane Huntley, who leads Google's Threat Analysis Group, which tracks and fights government-backed cyberattacks. “I can't speak to their intent, but one possibility is that they believe that if they take out telecoms networks that it would actually hinder their operations as well.”

Ukraine's State Service of Special Communications and Information Protection, which coordinates the country's cyber operations, said last week that Russian military personnel had stolen mobile phones from Ukrainians after phone companies cut off network access for phones with Russian numbers.

“Having deprived them of the opportunity to call their own numbers, the occupying forces are increasingly taking away phones from citizens. We call on Ukrainians whose mobile phones were taken away by representatives of enemy troops to inform the operator as soon as possible and ask [to] block the stolen phone,” the Ukrainian agency [said on Telegram](#).

[Tweets also purportedly show that](#) some of Russia's invading troops used cheap, off-the-shelf walkie talkies to communicate. Hacktivist groups including [Anonymous claim](#) to have interrupted Russian military communications. If those claims are true, it would help explain why Russian soldiers would turn to commercial networks to communicate.

Keeping the house intact

Another explanation is simply that Russia expected to win so quickly that it felt it could keep important telecommunications infrastructure intact that it would soon need to run the country.

“If you want to own the house, you're not going to burn it down,” Lewis said.

Even if Russia does succeed in claiming Ukraine, taking over a region's existing telecommunications infrastructure is already difficult without having to spend tens or hundreds of millions of dollars building entirely new cell towers. When Russia illegally annexed the Crimea peninsula in 2014, it took Moscow about three years to take full control of the region's mobile infrastructure. That's even though that cell network had been left intact during the invasion, according to [a 2020 paper from Citizen Lab, internet registry RIPE NCC and Japan-based IIJ Innovation Institute](#).

And it wasn't a simple process. Ukrainian mobile operator Ukrtelecom kept running the network for almost a year after the annexation in parts of Crimea, until armed guards surrounded the company's offices and blocked employees from entering, [according to TeleGeography, a consulting firm](#). Crimean providers relied on Ukrainian infrastructure while Russian state-owned provider Rostelecom laid a new submarine cable across the Kerch Strait to connect Crimea directly with Russia without having to pass through Ukraine.

Of course Crimea's population is about 20 times smaller than that of Ukraine. So the difficulty Russia had in taking over Crimean phone networks only hints at the challenges that assuming control of the Ukrainian phone system would entail, even if it were to remain intact.

Changing winds

But as Chris Krebs, a former director of CISA, noted in a virtual panel event on Twitter Wednesday as the invasion drags out, Russia's strategic calculus could change at any moment and the country could decide

	<p>to start bombing telecommunications infrastructure or send state-sponsored hackers in to shut it down altogether.</p> <p>And if that happens, it could be a clear sign of how Russia views its odds of winning: “[Russian President Vladimir] Putin of all people knows the intelligence benefits of keeping the networks up and running, and he expects to inherit them soon,” said Lewis, of CSIS. “It will be a sign that the Russians are giving up if they start blowing up critical infrastructure.”</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Mercado Libre confirms source code breach
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/e-commerce-giant-mercado-libre-confirms-source-code-data-breach/
GIST	<p>Argentinian e-commerce giant Mercado Libre has confirmed "unauthorized access" to a part of its source code this week.</p> <p>Mercado additionally says data of around 300,000 of its users was accessed by threat actors.</p> <p>The company's announcement follows a poll by the data extortion group, Lapsus\$ in which they threatened to leak data allegedly stolen from Mercado and other prominent companies.</p> <p>Data of 300,000 MercadoLibre users accessed</p> <p>In a press release and a Form 8-K filing seen by BleepingComputer today, MercadoLibre confirmed that a part of its source code had been subject to unauthorized access.</p> <p>Additionally, data of MercadoLibre's 300,000 users was accessed according to its initial analysis. At this time, it does not appear that Mercado's IT infrastructure was affected or that sensitive information has been compromised.</p> <p>It is not clear at this time if the information of these 300,000 Mercado users was stored in one of the source code repos—a practice BleepingComputer has come across before when reporting on some data breach cases.</p> <p>The company says it has activated security protocols and a thorough analysis is in progress.</p> <p>"We have not found any evidence that our infrastructure systems have been compromised or that any users' passwords, account balances, investments, financial information, or credit card information were obtained. We are taking strict measures to prevent further incidents," says Mercado.</p> <p>Headquartered in Buenos Aires, MercadoLibre makes up Latin America's largest e-commerce and payments ecosystem.</p> <p>The company boasts a user base of around 140 million unique active users and is present across eighteen countries including Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Venezuela, and Peru.</p> <p>The American arm of the company, Mercado Libre, Inc. operates online marketplaces including <i>mercadolibre.com</i>.</p> <p>Lapsus\$ claims to have breached 24,000 repos</p> <p>Data extortion group Lapsus\$ claims to have accessed 24,000 source code repositories of both MercadoLibre and Mercado Pago, as seen by BleepingComputer.</p> <p>A Telegram channel run by Lapsus\$ published a poll on March 7th, mockingly asking users to vote for the company whose data Lapsus\$ should leak next.</p>

The list of alleged victims also includes Impresa and Vodafone. Lapsus\$ states the poll will close on March 13th, 2022 at 00:00.

The development resembles Lapsus\$'s last week's leak of 190 GB-large archives that the group claimed contained "[confidential Samsung source code](#)." The same week, Samsung [confirmed](#) that threat actors had indeed breached its network and stolen confidential information, including source code present in Galaxy smartphones.

Extortion groups like Lapsus\$ breach victims but as opposed to encrypting confidential files like a ransomware operator would, these actors steal and hold on to victims' proprietary data, and publish it should their extortion demands be not met.

Earlier this month, Lapsus\$ claimed responsibility for a data breach at the American chipmaker giant, NVIDIA. The breach resulted in the theft of [more than 71,000 NVIDIA employee credentials](#), with some credentials leaked online.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 China hackers accessed 6 state govts.
SOURCE	https://statescoop.com/mandiant-apt41-chinese-hackers-state-government/
GIST	<p>A hacking group linked to the Chinese government has compromised the networks of at least six state governments since last May using multiple vulnerabilities, including one discovered late last year in the popular Log4j logging tool, according to research published Tuesday by Mandiant.</p> <p>The activity by APT41, an operation that U.S. officials have tied to China's Ministry of State Security — the country's civilian intelligence bureau — has been aggressive and ongoing, and represents a new focus from the group on U.S. state governments, Mandiant researcher Rufus Brown told StateScoop.</p> <p>"There has been a lot of focus on U.S. state government victims," Brown said.</p> <p>The hacking campaign began in May when APT41 gained access to a state-government network with malicious code injections against a proprietary web application. While Mandiant said it quickly thwarted that attempt, the hacking group returned two weeks later with an exploitation of a zero-day vulnerability in USAHerds, a piece of commercial software used by state agriculture agencies to track disease outbreaks in livestock.</p> <p>'It's a foothold'</p> <p>Mandiant found three states where APT41 compromised networks through the USAHerds vulnerability, though it did not name them. At least 18 state agriculture agencies use that software to manage cattle and poultry health. Researchers also found that other pieces of enterprise software written using Microsoft's ASP.NET framework were targeted during the hacking effort.</p> <p>Brown said APT41 used its exploitation of USAHerds to gain broader access into state networks.</p> <p>"They are leveraging anything they can that is connected to the internet," he said. "It's a foothold into the environment."</p> <p>According to Mandiant's Github page, the cybersecurity firm notified USAHerds' publisher, Acclaim Systems, of the zero-day last Nov. 23, with Acclaim stating that it had recently issued a patch. But APT41's campaign against state governments — and other organizations in the insurance and telecommunications industries — accelerated last December with the disclosure of the Log4j vulnerability.</p> <p>Brown said that within two hours of the Apache Foundation's Dec. 10 advisory that Log4j was susceptible to remote code executions that could allow attackers to take over affected devices, APT41 operators were on the move. The vulnerability's potential to reach hundreds of millions of devices worldwide led Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency Director Jen Easterly to call it at the time "one of the most serious I've seen in my entire career, if not the most serious."</p>

“The vulnerability had so much impact,” Brown said. “[APT41] switched over to this to gain more access. They continued to maintain access while exploiting Log4j at a wide variety of victims.”

‘All killer, no filler’

The Mandiant report also refers to the hacking group’s tactics as “all killer, no filler,” an appellation usually reserved for hard-charging rock albums, but which Brown said applied here because APT41 has changed up its techniques to maintain and regain access to state networks.

“Their [tactics, techniques and procedures] constantly change,” he said. “They employed really evasive techniques in their malware. Once they would get evicted, they would come back.”

Indeed, as recently as Feb. 26, two state governments where Mandiant had observed APT41 activity were breached again, the report reads.

APT41, which was [first identified in 2019](#), is also known by other companies as Barium, Wicked Spider or Winnti. While Mandiant has documented the group’s activity and versatility, less clear is the group’s motive for focusing on state government. Previous campaigns linked to the group have gone after information and data from the [telecom, semiconductor](#) and [gaming industries](#) — last October, it was suspected of [impersonating the Indian government](#) with phishing emails crafted to prey on COVID-19 fears.

The Justice Department [indicted seven suspected members](#) of the group in September 2020, though five of those individuals are Chinese nationals who U.S. authorities cannot reach.

“A big highlight is that we are not sure what they really want, but they really want to get what they want,” Brown said. “State governments have access to a lot of different parts of critical infrastructure. At this time we can’t make an assessment on what they’re going after.”

[Return to Top](#)

Terror Conditions

[Top of page](#)

Suspicious, Unusual

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Seahawks trade QB Russell Wilson
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/seahawks-reportedly-agree-to-trade-russell-wilson-to-broncos/ https://www.seattletimes.com/sports/seahawks/the-russell-wilson-trade-seems-justifiable-but-the-seahawks-had-better-be-right/
GIST	<p>In one of the biggest — if not the biggest — trades in Seattle sports history, the Seahawks agreed Tuesday to deal quarterback Russell Wilson to Denver for a mammoth haul of five draft picks and three players, including two first-rounders, and quarterback Drew Lock.</p> <p>A league source confirmed the parameters of the deal to The Seattle Times. Because of league rules, it won’t become official until the start of the new league year on March 16. However, ESPN reported Tuesday night that Wilson had passed a physical with the Broncos and signed a waiver of his no-trade clause, key steps to completing the trade. As of Tuesday night, the Seahawks had not officially confirmed the deal, but they can announce that it has been agreed upon before March 16.</p> <p>A source confirmed that talks between the Seahawks and Broncos heated up during the NFL combine last week in Indianapolis and were the result of the continued fraying of the relationship between Wilson and</p>

Seattle and of Denver giving the Seahawks an offer that proved too good to turn down, given the circumstances.

A source also confirmed that while Seattle got multiple offers for Wilson — including one reported last week from Washington — Denver was the only team of those that made offers that Wilson agreed to waive his no-trade clause for. In fact, a report from The Washington Post Tuesday stated the Commanders offered Seattle three first-round picks. But Wilson apparently would not waive his no-trade clause to go to Washington. Reports Tuesday night also stated that the Eagles tried to trade for Wilson but that Wilson would not waive his no-trade clause to go to Philly.

The talks with Denver, whose second-year general manager George Paton had made clear for months he would swing big to get a quarterback, were said to have intensified and culminated Tuesday after Denver learned it would not be able to get Aaron Rodgers, who agreed to a four-year deal worth \$200 million to stay with Green Bay.

The Seahawks also understood that Rodgers' contract could serve as a starting point for any future talks with Wilson, who had two years remaining on a four-year, \$35 million-per-year deal he signed in April 2019. That deal was finalized only after the Seahawks agreed to Wilson's request for a no-trade clause, rare by NFL standards, and which ultimately played a pivotal role in Tuesday's trade.

And the challenge the team knew it would have re-signing Wilson in a year played a role in the Seahawks' decision to move on knowing that they might get their best package in return for Wilson now instead of waiting a year, especially with Wilson making it clear he was not only amenable to a trade but was more than happy to be moved to the right team. It was already expected Wilson would ask for a contract following the 2022 season that would put him on par with, if not surpass, Rodgers.

A source confirmed that Seattle will also send a fourth-round pick to Denver while getting three players, including Lock, as well as two first-rounders, two second-rounders and a fifth. Lock, a second-round pick of the Broncos in 2019, has an 8-13 record as a starter, including 0-3 in 2021.

A source confirmed to The Times that one of the other players Seattle will get is defensive end Shelby Harris, a 30-year-old who had six sacks in 2021. Harris has two years remaining on his contract, due to make \$7.5 million in 2022.

Seattle will also get tight end Noah Fant, who is entering his fourth year and had 68 receptions for 670 yards and four touchdowns last season.

And with this trade, the Seahawks are now expected to have eight overall picks, including Nos. 9, 40, 41 and 72, in the 2022 draft, which will be held April 28-30.

Also adding some urgency to get the deal done now is that Wilson's \$5 million roster bonus was due March 21. He also has no guaranteed money left in his contract, making a deal less complicated to complete now than a year ago.

The trade sends Wilson to the team against which he had his greatest moment as a Seahawk, Seattle's 43-8 win over Denver in Super Bowl XLVIII. According to ESPN, Wilson becomes the first player to start for a team that he beat in a Super Bowl.

While rumors of Wilson's future with the team hovered since last year, the Seahawks appeared to tamp them down last week when coach Pete Carroll said at the combine that the Seahawks "had no intention" to trade Wilson and that general manager John Schneider had told teams who called about Wilson that Seattle was "not shopping the quarterback."

But the Seahawks stopped short of saying Wilson would not be dealt, and Schneider said he would not be doing his job if he didn't take calls on Wilson.

When Denver kept calling and Wilson agreed to waive his no-trade clause, the deal got done. Wilson was thought to prefer Denver in part due to its corps of young receivers and solid defense, as well as playing for a first-year offensive-minded coach in Nathaniel Hackett, who was the offensive coordinator for Green Bay the last three years.

The trade means Wilson will still play a game in Seattle next season as the Broncos are on the list of Seahawks' home opponents in 2022.

But thus ends the 10-year career of Wilson in Seattle, one that may have been as important as any in franchise history, if not Seattle sports history.

The Seahawks had four straight losing seasons before Wilson arrived in 2012, taken in the third round at No. 75 overall out of Wisconsin.

He led Seattle to an 11-5 record and a playoff berth his first year and then to the Super Bowl each of his next two seasons, including the Seahawks' only title following the 2013 season.

Wilson ended last season with the most wins of any quarterback in the first 10 years of his career of any in NFL history — 113 — including regular season and playoffs.

But Wilson, who turned 33 in November, endured the worst season of his career in 2021, missing three games with a ruptured and dislocated right middle finger as Seattle fell to 7-10, the first losing season for the Seahawks since 2011, the year before Wilson was drafted.

Rumors surrounding Wilson's future began circulating last season when he said he was frustrated with how often he had been hit during his career and that he wanted more of a say in moves the organization made. It was later reported that his agent, Mark Rodgers, had told the team he would approve a trade to one of four teams — the Saints, Raiders, Packers and Bears.

Credible reports stated that the Seahawks turned down a blockbuster offer from the Bears, with Carroll said to have nixed the trade at the last minute.

Denver was not on that list. But with Denver aggressively pursuing a quarterback and Wilson increasingly uncertain about his future in Seattle — and the Seahawks realizing that a stare down with Wilson was coming after the 2022 season at the latest — the deal was made.

Wilson said repeatedly this offseason that his "hope" was to end his career in Seattle. But like the team, he never definitively said he would stay.

That Carroll turns 71 in September led to the idea that the team would hold on to Wilson for one more season, keep the team largely together in 2022 and try to get back to the playoffs.

So what does Seattle do now at quarterback?

The Seahawks are thought to believe Lock has more potential than he showed in Denver. He becomes one of only two QBs currently on Seattle's roster, the other being former UW and Lake Stevens standout Jacob Eason, whom the Seahawks claimed off waivers last season. Seattle is also likely to re-sign Geno Smith, the team's backup the last three years.

But the Seahawks will also now pursue other QB options via trade, free agency and the draft, possibly using some of its draft capital acquired Tuesday to try to make a deal. Among those Seattle could seek are Sam Darnold of Carolina, Carson Wentz of Indianapolis, Jimmy Garoppolo of the 49ers and possibly Deshaun Watson of Houston, among others.

Seattle will save \$11 million against the cap with the trade of Wilson but will still take on a \$26 million dead cap hit. According to ESPN, that is the second-biggest dead cap hit any NFL team has ever taken other than the Eagles taking a \$33.8 million dead cap hit when they dealt Wentz to the Colts.

According to OvertheCap.com, though, Seattle's net cap savings for 2022, when including the cap hits of the three players acquired in the trade, will be just \$775,000.

However, the trade also means Seattle will save \$27 million against the cap in 2023, the final year of Wilson's contract, and that the Seahawks can now forge contracts with other players this season knowing it has that cap space available down the road.

Like Seattle, Denver finished 7-10 in 2021. But the Broncos fired Vic Fangio and hired Hackett, who drew raves for his work with Aaron Rodgers, as their new head coach.

That undoubtedly appealed to Wilson, who has been rumored to feel stifled in the offense of Seattle and Carroll, who comes from a defensive background and has stressed being careful with the football and building around a running game.

Wilson finishes his Seattle career with a regular-season record of 104-53-1 and numerous team records, including 292 touchdowns, which ranks 15th in NFL history. His final TD came on a 25-yarder to Freddie Swain that helped secure a 38-30 win at Arizona on Jan. 9, his final play coming on a kneel down as the final seconds of that game ran off the clock.

In the annals of Seattle sports history, this will forever be the flashpoint: Where were you when you heard [Russell Wilson was being traded to the Denver Broncos](#)?

Oh, it had been floating as a possibility since two Super Bowls ago, with far more substance to it (obviously) than many people wanted to acknowledge. And yet the finality of the midmorning tweetstorm hit with the impact of [Kam Chancellor's hit on Vernon Davis](#).

You could call it the most shocking Seattle sports transaction since Ken Griffey Jr. was traded to the Reds in February 2000, yet that had been openly chronicled for months and was a foregone conclusion. The Wilson trade was always a shadowy concept, lurking in the realm of possibility but seemingly too complex and too fraught with danger to actually be pulled off.

And yet here we are: An audacious, practically unfathomable decision by the Seahawks on Tuesday to trade the most successful and dynamic player in franchise history, the quarterback who brought them their only Super Bowl title and was widely viewed by many analysts as a necessary component if they were ever to land another one in the near future.

Here's my knee-jerk, bottom-line reaction: They had better be right.

For all the ways you can make sense of this trade, the rationales you can use to wrap your head around it, there can't help but be trepidation, a sense of genuine dread, at trading a sure-thing quarterback such as Wilson. So many teams have fallen into an endless morass of mediocrity — or worse — simply because they couldn't find an adequate QB to round out an otherwise playoff-caliber team.

It is a justifiable move when you get into the complexities of the salary cap and the ultimate Catch-22 of the modern NFL: You can't win a Super Bowl without a great quarterback, but great quarterbacks make such a high percentage of the cap you can't build a team around them to win a Super Bowl.

It is also defensible in the context of a Seahawks team with numerous holes to fill and a lack of draft capital to fill them, all the while looking at a division with nothing but playoff teams — and the Super

Bowl champion — above it. That's in part an indictment of Seattle's poor drafting as well as what is shaping up increasingly as an ill-advised trade for Jamal Adams ... but that's where they were.

When you add in the undeniable tension that had developed between Wilson, his camp and the Seahawks, it adds another element that helped grease Wilson's departure from Seattle.

Some had interpreted the [recent comments from coach Pete Carroll and general manager John Schneider](#) at the NFL combine as shutting the door on trading Wilson. Yet if you parsed their words, complete with qualifiers and a notable absence of definitive door-slamming on trade rumors, you should perhaps be less shocked at the outcome.

All the smoke from the past 15 months — the voiced and unvoiced dissatisfaction by Wilson over his protection and how the Seahawks' offense deployed him, the list of acceptable trade destinations given to Schneider last year by Wilson's agent and subsequent trade talks, the disappointing 7-10 season in 2021, the serious recent pursuit of Wilson by the Washington Commanders and perhaps other teams — was obviously indicative of accompanying fire.

Then add in the fact that although Wilson has two years left on his contract, the timetable for working on negotiating a new one was rapidly approaching. And believe it or not, the one-time landmark deal Wilson signed in 2019, making him the highest-paid player in NFL history at \$35 million annual value, is now looking like a relative bargain.

The timing might well have been coincidental, because this trade appears to have been in the works for a while. Yet [Aaron Rodgers agreeing to a massive new contract](#) with the Green Bay Packers on Tuesday, a few hours before the Wilson trade was announced, has obvious ramifications for Wilson.

If Rodgers receives \$50 million annually, as reported, you can bet Wilson will want something in that ballpark.

Remember, when Wilson got his first extension, it was for \$21.9 million annually — \$100,000 less than Rodgers' \$22 million. Wilson's next contract, for \$35 million annually, notably leapfrogged Rodgers' \$33.5 million.

So look for that little competition to play out again — and the quarterback-starved Broncos will no doubt be happy to accommodate their new franchise player, who they see as the elusive missing link that will lead them back to the promised land.

And now the Seahawks will have to show they can forge their own championship path without Wilson. It's what Carroll and Schneider effectively staked their futures on Tuesday with the trade heard 'round the world. Carroll has steadfastly declared since the end of last season that the Seahawks won't be going into rebuilding mode. Quite the contrary, he practically shouted it from the rooftop: "We have a championship nucleus."

Now they have sent away what is inarguably the most vital element of that nucleus for a slew of draft picks and three players, including a quarterback in Drew Lock who was deemed insufficient in Denver.

The Seahawks as we've known them for the past decade have been inalterably transformed. A franchise that under Carroll adopted the motto "always compete" has bet everything that this is a better path to success than the one they had with Russell Wilson, who won more games in his first 10 years than any quarterback in NFL history. They will commence some measure of a rebuild with a coach who will be 71 in September.

It's bold. It's daring. It's audacious. It's even courageous. And the Seahawks, specifically Carroll and Schneider, had better be right, or what happened Tuesday will be the albatross they'll carry forever.

HEADLINE	03/09 One of history's great wrecks is found
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/09/climate/endurance-wreck-found-shackleton.html
GIST	<p>The wreck of Endurance has been found in the Antarctic, 106 years after the historic ship was crushed in pack ice and sank during an expedition by the explorer Ernest Shackleton.</p> <p>A team of adventurers, marine archaeologists and technicians located the wreck at the bottom of the Weddell Sea, east of the Antarctic Peninsula, using undersea drones. Battling sea ice and freezing temperatures, the team had been searching for more than two weeks in a 150-square-mile area around where the ship went down in 1915.</p> <p>Endurance, a 144-foot, three-masted wooden ship, holds a revered place in polar history because it spawned one of the greatest survival stories in the annals of exploration. Its location, nearly 10,000 feet down in waters that are among the iciest on Earth, placed it among the most celebrated shipwrecks that had not been found.</p> <p>The discovery of the wreck was announced Wednesday in a statement by the search expedition, Endurance22.</p> <p>“We have made polar history with the discovery of Endurance, and successfully completed the world’s most challenging shipwreck search,” said John Shears, the expedition’s leader.</p> <p>The first images of the ship since those taken by Shackleton’s photographer, Frank Hurley, revealed parts of the vessel in astonishing detail. An image of the stern showed the name “ENDURANCE” above a five-pointed star, a holdover from before Shackleton bought the ship, when it was named Polaris. Another showed the rear deck and the ship’s wheel.</p> <p>A video provided by the expedition’s organizer, the Falklands Maritime Heritage Trust, showed the bow and portions of the deck and hull.</p> <p>Mensun Bound, the expedition’s exploration director and a marine archaeologist who has discovered many shipwrecks, said Endurance was the finest he had ever seen. It is upright, clear of the seabed and “in a brilliant state of preservation,” he said.</p> <p>The ship was found about four miles south of the last location recorded by Shackleton’s captain and navigator, Frank Worsley. The search had been conducted over a wide area to account for errors in Worsley’s navigation equipment.</p> <p>Endurance’s relatively pristine appearance was not unexpected, given the cold water and the lack of wood-eating marine organisms in the Weddell Sea that have ravaged shipwrecks elsewhere.</p> <p>Mr. Bound also described the wreck as “intact.” Although Hurley’s photographs before the sinking had shown major damage to, and the collapse of, the ship’s mast and rigging, and there had been damage to the hull, Mr. Bound had expected most of the ship to be in one piece.</p> <p>The expedition video showed what appeared to be broken masts and damage to the decks.</p> <p>The hunt for the wreck, which cost more than \$10 million, provided by a donor who wished to remain anonymous, was conducted from a South African icebreaker that left Cape Town in early February. Aside from a few technical glitches involving the two submersibles, and part of a day spent icebound when operations were suspended, the search proceeded relatively smoothly.</p> <p>The battery-powered submersibles combed the seafloor twice a day, for about six hours at a time. They used sonar to scan a swath of the smooth seabed, looking for anything that rose above it. Once the wreck was located several days ago, the equipment was swapped for high-resolution cameras and other instruments to make detailed images and scans.</p>

Under the terms of the Antarctic Treaty, the six-decade-old pact intended to protect the region, the wreck is considered a historical monument. The submersibles did not touch it; the images and scans will be used as the basis for educational materials and museum exhibits. A documentary is planned, as well.

Shackleton left England aboard Endurance with a crew of 27 in 1914, bound for a bay on the Weddell Sea that was meant to be the starting point for an attempt by him and a small party to be the first to cross Antarctica. This was close to the end of what has become known as the heroic age of Antarctic exploration, which included treks by the Norwegian Roald Amundsen, who in 1911 was the first to reach the pole, and by Robert Falcon Scott, a Briton who died after reaching it a month later.

Shackleton never made it to the pole or beyond, but his leadership in rescuing all his crew and his exploits, which included an 800-mile open-boat journey across the treacherous Southern Ocean to the island of South Georgia, made him a hero in Britain.

Shackleton was tripped up by the Weddell's notoriously thick, long-lasting sea ice, which results from a circular current that keeps much ice within it. In early January 1915 Endurance became stuck less than 100 miles from its destination and drifted with the ice for more than 10 months as the ice slowly crushed it.

As the ship became damaged, the crew set up camp on the ice and lived on the ice until it broke up five months after the ship sank.

The Weddell Sea still remains far icier than other Antarctic waters, though in recent years ice conditions have been lighter than usual. That was the situation this year, and it helped the expedition reach the search site more easily and remain there safely. The icebreaker, Agulhas II, left the search area on Tuesday for the 11-day voyage back to Cape Town.

In addition to the expedition team, several ice researchers were on board, including Stefanie Arndt of the Alfred Wegener Institute in Germany. Dr. Arndt, who studies how Antarctic sea ice may change as the world warms because of human-caused emissions of greenhouse gases, and others spent much time out on the ice drilling cores. On Monday she said on Twitter that they had collected 630 samples from 17 locations, which she called "an incredible number."

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 IG: DHS published Jan 6 threat info Jan 8
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/dhs-identified-specific-threat-information-related-jan-watchdog/story?id=83324444
GIST	<p>The Department of Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis "identified specific threat information related to the events on January 6, 2021, but did not issue any intelligence products about these threats until January 8," according to a DHS inspector general report released Tuesday.</p> <p>"Open source collectors in I&A's Current and Emerging Threats Center collected open source threat information but did not produce any actionable information," the inspector general's report concluded, saying the information was identified "weeks" before the attack on the U.S. Capitol.</p> <p>The report said that was because of an inexperienced intelligence collector who didn't receive proper training as well as a "hesitancy" to report information after the 2020 summer of unrest.</p> <p>During the summer of 2020, the unit faced criticism for compiling intelligence on journalists reporting on the events, as well as non-violent protesters.</p> <p>The report was first reported by CNN.</p> <p>The mission of the Intelligence and Analysis unit at DHS, according to the IG, is to provide information to state and local law enforcement partners on various issues of national attention.</p>

"I&A's Counterterrorism Mission Center (CTMC) identified indicators that the January 6, 2021 events might turn violent but did not issue an intelligence product outside I&A, even though it had done so for other events," the report said.

They did email information the agency had to local Washington, D.C., law enforcement agencies but that is as far as the communication went, the report said.

On the morning of Jan. 6, the deputy secretary of Homeland Security was briefed on potential violence at the Capitol, but did not disseminate any intelligence products relating to the threat of violence, the inspector general found.

Some of the information collected by the unit were online calls by event organizers to bring weapons to the event and more lethal weapons.

"An individual claimed there would not be enough law enforcement officers to stop the number of armed people arriving in the area," an assessment of the online activity from December 30th says.

In another instance, an I&A intelligence collector messaged colleagues indicating individuals were sharing a map of the U.S. Capitol online.

"I feel like people are actually going to try and hurt politicians. Jan 6th is gonna be crazy, not to mention the inauguration," an unnamed intelligence collector wrote on Jan. 2. A day later, collectors found chatter discussing "hanging politicians," but maintained these threats did not meet their reporting threshold.

Ultimately, according to the inspector general, the collectors did not think storming the Capitol was remotely possible and dismissed these notions.

Comparatively, the inspector general said DHS distributed information on possible violence stemming from the riots in Portland, Oregon, over the summer, but it had less threat indicators than that of perspective violence at the Capitol.

The inspector general also says DHS shared "limited" information with state and local partners. Shortly after the FBI Norfolk office published an intelligence product about individuals who wanted to establish a "quick reaction force" in Northern Virginia, which did prove true according to court documents, I&A analysts shared their information in a limited scope with local law enforcement.

As a response to the inspector general report, I&A is improving their information sharing and training capabilities.

In a message to all Intelligence and Analysis Unit staff, acting Director John Cohen said they are working to strengthen the I&A capabilities.

"We have embarked on many improvements to bolster our intelligence collection and analysis, clarify guidance for intelligence officers, improve information sharing and operational coordination, and identify new resources to combat domestic violent extremism (DVE)," Cohen wrote in an email obtained by ABC News. "We will continue to build on the positive momentum we made in 2021, implement new and necessary changes as we adapt to the next generation of threats, and remain focused on the defense of the Homeland."

"As Secretary Mayorkas has said, the attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 was a violent assault on our democracy. Over the past fourteen months, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has strengthened intelligence analysis, information sharing, and operational preparedness to help prevent acts of violence and keep our communities safe," a DHS spokesperson told ABC News in response to the report's release.

	The spokesperson said the agency has increased their information sharing with partners from across government and bringing all the department's resources to bare in ways that "protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties, and adhere to applicable laws."
Return to Top	OIG-22-29-Mar22-Redacted by ABC News Politics on Scribd

Crime, Criminals

[Top of page](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 DOJ charges woman as Kremlin spy
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/justice-department-foreign-agent-espionage-spy/2022/03/08/id/1060294/
GIST	<p>The Justice Department has charged a dual citizen of Russia and the United States with acting as a Kremlin spy for Vladimir Putin, failing to register as a foreign agent.</p> <p>Elena Branson, 61, became a dual citizen in 1999 after nine years in the U.S. and has been charged with having "actively subverted foreign agent registration laws in the United States in order to promote Russian policies and ideology," according to Damian Williams, U.S. attorney for the Southern District of New York.</p> <p>"Branson is alleged to have corresponded with Putin himself and met with a high-ranking Russia minister before founding a Russian propaganda center here in New York City, the Russian Center New York," Williams added.</p> <p>"Branson's promotional outreach, including an 'I Love Russia' campaign aimed at American youths, exemplifies her attempts to act at the behest of the Russian government to illegally promote its interests in the United States."</p> <p>Williams asserted that "Branson knew she was supposed to register as an agent of the Russian government but chose not to do so and, instead, instructed others regarding how to illegally avoid the same."</p> <p>A federal court in New York unsealed a complaint Tuesday charging Branson with acting and conspiring to act in the United States illegally as an agent of the Russian government, willfully failing to register under the Foreign Agents Registration Act, as well as conspiring to commit visa fraud and making false statements to the FBI.</p> <p>According to court documents, beginning in at least 2011, Branson worked on behalf of the Russian government and Russian officials to advance Russian interests in the United States, including by coordinating meetings for Russian officials to lobby U.S. political officials and businesspeople, and by operating organizations in the United States for the purpose of publicly promoting Russian government policies.</p> <p>"The evidence gathered in the Branson case shows she is a serial offender in violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act in order to promote Russian interests," Assistant Director Alan E. Kohler Jr. of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division said in a statement.</p> <p>"While living in the United States for nearly a decade, she allegedly took money and direction from Russian government officials — including some at the Russian Embassy in Washington, D.C. — as she arranged meetings for Russian officials to lobby U.S. officials. The FBI and our partners will continue to investigate and stop individuals who hide their work for foreign governments, like the one in Moscow."</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Judge dismisses Prince Andrew case
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/mar/08/prince-andrew-virginia-giuffre-accuser-lawsuit-settlement

GIST	<p>A US judge on Tuesday ordered that Virginia Giuffre’s lawsuit against Britain’s Prince Andrew in New York be dismissed after the two parties reached a settlement, a court filing showed.</p> <p>US district judge Lewis Kaplan signed court papers dismissing the August lawsuit after lawyers on both sides asked him to do so. The judge had given them until 17 March to complete the deal or he would set a trial date.</p> <p>Attorneys for Andrew and Giuffre had filed with a federal judge formal notice to dismiss the lawsuit between them, as both parties have officially settled the case.</p> <p>Last month, Andrew agreed to settle the civil suit filed by Giuffre regarding allegations of sexual assault. The payment was not disclosed but was thought to be between \$13m and \$15m.</p> <p>The stipulation of dismissal filed on Tuesday said that both parties “hereby stipulate to the dismissal of this action, with prejudice”, adding that each party would “bear her/his own costs and fees”.</p> <p>Giuffre alleges she met Andrew through the late sex offender and financier Jeffrey Epstein, and his sometime girlfriend, the convicted sex trafficker Ghislaine Maxwell.</p> <p>Giuffre alleged the prince sexually assaulted her on three occasions when she was 17.</p> <p>Andrew has repeatedly denied the allegations. The settlement announced in February made no admission of guilt.</p> <p>The settlement also stated that Andrew had “never intended to malign Ms Giuffre’s character” and said he recognized she had “suffered both as an established victim of abuse and as a result of unfair public attacks”.</p> <p>The settlement also said Andrew would make a “substantial donation” to Giuffre’s charity in support of sexual assault victims.</p> <p>In 2009, Epstein and Giuffre settled a civil lawsuit for \$500,000. Giuffre accused Epstein of trafficking her to Andrew.</p> <p>In January, Andrew was completely removed from official royal life. The Queen stripped him of his honorary military roles and royal patronages amid the sexual assault case.</p>
------	---

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 FBI: food aid nonprofits fraud investigation
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/08/us/politics/food-aid-nonprofits-fraud-investigation.html
GIST	<p>MINNEAPOLIS — Last year, with the federal government making available huge new sums of money for programs to feed needy children during the pandemic, a nonprofit organization called Advance Youth Athletic Development set up what it described as an enormous child care operation in northeast Minneapolis that could prepare 5,000 dinners each weeknight.</p> <p>Based on the group’s claims, the State of Minnesota channeled \$3.2 million of the federal food aid to the program.</p> <p>But on a subzero morning in January, the F.B.I. carried out a series of predawn raids around the region. It revealed a sprawling investigation into Advance Youth Athletic Development and other groups like it — and the much larger nonprofit organization, Feeding Our Future, that was responsible for ensuring that the money provided to the smaller groups was spent properly.</p> <p>In court filings, the F.B.I. said it had discovered a “massive fraud scheme” among groups that Feeding Our Future was supposed to oversee, saying they siphoned off tens of millions of dollars by charging taxpayers for nonexistent meals.</p>

In affidavits filed in federal court, the Justice Department said it was investigating at least 15 different feeding operations. Together, the F.B.I. said, these groups — all of which were supposed to be overseen by Feeding Our Future — had received more than \$65 million from federal food programs during the coronavirus pandemic.

“Almost none of this money was used to feed children,” the government wrote in one filing. “Instead, conspirators misappropriated the money and used it to purchase real estate, cars and other items.”

When a reporter recently visited the address listed for Advance Youth Athletic Development, there was no sign of a kitchen or a large child care facility. It was a second-story apartment.

“No. No. No,” said Lul Mohamoud, a neighbor in the apartment across the hall, when asked if she had ever seen 5,000 children there. “I have never seen any kids going in there.”

No one has yet been charged in the case, and the leaders of Feeding Our Future, Advance Youth Athletic Development and other nonprofit groups have denied wrongdoing.

But the case has highlighted how the government’s reliance on nonprofits to help carry out an array of programs can increase vulnerability to fraud — a problem that only increased over the past several years, as Washington pumped trillions of dollars into pandemic aid packages.

That aid has focused new attention on the role of nonprofits in particular in acting as conduits and overseers of federal money that flows through them via the states and then to smaller organizations that carry out programs. States and the federal government count on groups like Feeding Our Future to guard against corruption — even as the system incentivizes the organizations to push more money out the door by giving them a cut of it.

In his State of the Union address last week, President Biden said that “billions” in pandemic aid had been stolen, and that he would soon name a chief prosecutor for pandemic fraud.

In Minnesota, state regulators said that even after they grew suspicious of Feeding Our Future, they had been constrained by the courts from stopping the organization. In fact, the state paid the group more than \$197 million after the first suspicions were raised.

“The scale of this, and the rapidity of it, is astonishing,” said State Senator Roger C. Chamberlain, a Minnesota Republican whose committee oversees the food programs. He said his goal was to understand “why this system failed and collapsed completely. Because it certainly did.”

In all, more than 200 investigators from the F.B.I. and other agencies raided 15 homes and offices around the Twin Cities.

The Minnesota case involves two multibillion-dollar federal food-aid programs, both funded by the Agriculture Department but administered by states. One pays for meals at preschools, emergency shelters and aftercare centers. The other pays for meals at summer activities.

In the 1970s, Congress created a role in both programs for nonprofits called sponsors, so that giant state bureaucracies and tiny day care centers did not have to talk to one another directly.

In theory, the nonprofit groups that fill the sponsor role make sure that feeding sites follow the rules, then hand out federal money to those that do.

The watchdogs can keep as an “administrative fee” up to 15 percent of the funds they pass along. Critics say that creates a perverse incentive: a reason for the watchdog not to bark. The structure, they say, rewards sponsors that pursue bigger networks and larger checks instead of those who crack down on fraud — a problem that has been evident for decades.

“Since the sponsor is essentially the internal control for this program, any disreputable sponsor could abuse the program with little or no chance of being detected,” the Agriculture Department’s inspector general wrote in 1998, after an investigation called Operation Kiddie Care found “fraud on a grand scale” in one of these programs. “In fact, the design of the program may encourage program abuse.”

The Agriculture Department declined a request to interview an official about the case. Instead, the department issued a statement saying that “it takes fraud and the protection of taxpayer dollars very seriously.”

Since the F.B.I. raids, news coverage by The Star-Tribune and Sahan Journal, a local nonprofit media outlet, has revealed that some of the operators of Feeding Our Future sites had criminal records, and that a former top aide to Mayor Jacob Frey of Minneapolis, a Democrat, was among those under investigation. The aide has denied wrongdoing.

Minnesota first approved Feeding Our Future as a sponsor in 2018. In its first years, the group oversaw only a few feeding sites — and, at times, seemed to struggle with overseeing itself.

In February 2020, for instance, the I.R.S. revoked the group’s nonprofit status after it failed to file an annual report for three years. (Feeding Our Future says that status was later reinstated, but the I.R.S. still lists it as revoked.)

In other filings, Feeding Our Future said it had a three-member board to provide outside oversight of its finances. But the man listed as the board’s president from 2018 to 2020, Ben Stayberg, a bartender and electrician, said he had been tricked into taking the job and had “absolutely nothing” to do with overseeing the organization.

“I had a friend, she was like, ‘Will you just sign, put your name on there?’” he said in an interview. “I was like, ‘All right.’” Mr. Stayberg declined to give the friend’s name.

When the pandemic hit, Feeding Our Future’s world changed.

School was out. Children were hungry. Starting in 2020, Congress poured money into the feeding programs and allowed the Agriculture Department to waive rules that had been put in place after previous scandals to make sure states watched the watchdogs. For instance, state officials no longer had to visit feeding sites in person to see whether they were doing what the paperwork said.

After that, Feeding Our Future began to grow rapidly, adding dozens of new sites to its network. Some of them were start-up nonprofits that had sprung up during the pandemic and never served food before.

From 2019 to 2021, the number of children in Feeding Our Future’s network increased to about 400,000, from about 4,000, according to state records. The revenue flowing through its network increased to \$197 million from \$3.5 million.

Feeding Our Future’s share grew to about \$19 million, which its founder and president, Aimee Bock, said she spent largely on salaries for her 80 employees and supplies for feeding sites. She said she paid herself \$190,000.

But there were puzzling features at some of the group’s new sites. In Minneapolis, two Feeding Our Future locations claimed to be running large child care centers out of the same small building — one feeding 2,000 children a day, the other 500, according to state records. (Ms. Bock said the state records were wrong, and she had never claimed that food was served there.)

Another operation, housed in the nearby Safari Restaurant, claimed to be feeding 6,000 children a day on its own — more than the total number of children living in the restaurant’s ZIP code. Ms. Bock said the

children came from surrounding areas, because the food was appropriate for East African immigrants, many of whom live in the area.

Advance Youth Athletic Development's site — the location that turned out to be a second-story apartment — had obtained nonprofit status in June, using a fast-track I.R.S. process for groups that expect to have receipts of less than \$50,000 per year. The F.B.I. said that after the nonprofit partnered with Feeding Our Future, it asked for \$730,000 in reimbursements in its first month.

A lawyer for Feeding Our Future said the group never had an accountant on staff.

Then came the F.B.I. raids.

"My entire house shook," Ms. Bock said. On the morning of Jan. 20, she said she heard banging and then saw F.B.I. agents at her front door. "All I could see were the spotlight and three guns, and they were just shouting, 'Get down here! Get your hands up!'"

In an interview, Ms. Bock said she did not believe anyone in her network had cheated the system.

But if there was fraud, she added, "every test we have in place and every protection we have in place didn't catch it. Is it possible? Absolutely. And if they got one over on us, I will help hold them accountable."

Guhaad Said, the leader of Advance Youth Athletic Development, said the state's numbers were wrong.

"I don't know where that number came from," he said in a phone interview. "I don't know where the 5,000 children came from."

That number appeared on the group's application to enroll in one of the food-aid programs, which Feeding Our Future submitted to the state.

Mr. Said said his group had served meals at the site but declined to cite how many.

"There was not proper oversight" from Feeding Our Future, he said. "So people may have made some mistakes here and there. But there was no intention to go out there and waste government money."

In Minnesota, state regulators had grown alarmed by Feeding Our Future's growth and lack of financial controls by summer 2020, a spokeswoman for the state's Department of Education said. It tried to stop payments for many of the group's sites. But Feeding Our Future asked a judge to intervene, accusing the state of discrimination because of its work with African immigrants and saying the state had not proved any allegations of fraud.

If its payments were cut off, the organization told a judge, the results would be catastrophic, leading to bankruptcy, lost jobs and hungry children.

A judge ruled that the state had not taken the necessary steps to stop the payments. After that, Minnesota officials called in the F.B.I. and continued to channel aid through the group while federal agents conducted a nine-month investigation.

After the F.B.I. raids, Feeding Our Future was blocked from receiving state food aid. The group sought to formally dissolve in late February.

Minnesota's attorney general, Keith Ellison, said on Thursday that he was conducting a separate investigation of the group to determine whether it had violated state nonprofit laws.

The state has also sought to cut ties with a second sponsor called Partners in Quality Care, which had supervised some of the nonprofits that worked with Feeding Our Future.

A lawyer for Partners in Quality Care said it was fighting the action and had no indication that it was under investigation. As of last year, Feeding Our Future and Partners in Quality Care together oversaw 53 percent of the money that Minnesota disbursed through these two federal aid programs.

But even after the F.B.I. raids, there are suggestions that some people are still trying to game the system.

Lily Crooks, who operates a small day care center in Minneapolis, said she had worked with Feeding Our Future and received about \$30 per month for a year for the snacks she served her children. After Feeding Our Future was raided, she said, a new sponsor called to recruit her — and immediately offered a plan to fool the state.

What if, the woman suggested, Ms. Crooks told the government that her snack was actually a full meal instead? “We could call it breakfast” and make five times more, Ms. Crooks recalled the woman saying.

Ms. Crooks said she declined, and was disheartened by the offer. “They are watchdogs, right?”

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Arrests: 6 teens in Iowa school shooting
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/6-teens-arrested-after-deadly-shooting-at-des-moines-iowa-high-school
GIST	<p>DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) - Authorities arrested six teenagers accused of shooting into a group that had gathered outside an Iowa high school, killing a 15-year-old boy and seriously wounding two teenage girls, police said Tuesday.</p> <p>The suspects are each charged with first-degree murder and two counts of attempted murder in the Monday afternoon shooting on the grounds of East High School, near Des Moines’ downtown, about a half-mile (0.8 kilometers) from the Capitol. Police said gunshots fired outside the school came from several shooters from multiple vehicles.</p> <p>Police named the suspects as Octavio Lopez, 17; Henry Valladares-Amaya, 17; Manuel Buezo, 16; Romero Perdomo, 16; Alex Perdomo, 15; and Nyang Chamdual, 14. All are from Des Moines and the school district didn’t identify any as attending East.</p> <p>Police identified the 15-year-old killed as Jose David Lopez, of Des Moines.</p> <p>Lopez, who was not a student at the school, was the intended target of the drive-by shooting, police said. The other two shot are females, 16 and 18, who both attend East and were among a group standing with Lopez when they were inadvertently shot, police said. Police had not released the surviving victims’ names by Tuesday afternoon.</p> <p>Police said the 16-year-old girl remained hospitalized Tuesday in serious condition, while the 18-year-old remained hospitalized in critical condition.</p> <p>"While this incident occurred outside of a school, it could have occurred in any one of our neighborhoods," police said. "The school is where the suspects found their target."</p> <p>Police said search warrants were conducted at five Des Moines homes and six vehicles in the hours after the shooting. Investigators seized six guns during those searches, police said.</p> <p>According to court documents, neighborhood camera footage captured the shooting. It showed a group of five teens gathered near a curb when three vehicles passed by and then returned, with people inside firing multiple shots at the group.</p> <p>Surveillance footage also showed vehicles matching the description from the shooting site departing another site and then returning soon after the shooting. The footage showed individuals that took part in the shooting, according to court documents.</p>

Investigators recovered about 20 spent shell casings at the shooting site and found another 15 in the vehicles that police said were used in the shooting.

On the day of the shooting, calls started pouring in around 2:50 p.m. Monday, shortly before classes were scheduled to dismiss for the day, police spokesman, Sgt. Paul Parizek said.

The district said in a news release that the school was immediately put into lockdown and students were kept inside while police investigated. They were dismissed around 3:30 p.m. after law enforcement gave an all clear.

Principal Jill Versteeg described what happened as "everyone's worst nightmare" and urged parents to "hug your students and love them."

Officials had already suspended classes districtwide Tuesday so juniors could take the ACT college admissions test. The ACT exams and parent-teacher conferences were canceled Tuesday at East High School and classes will not be held at the school later this week. The district also was making grief counselors available.

President Joe Biden issued a statement Tuesday night offering prayers to the families of the students killed and injured in the shooting. He also praised police and other first responders but noted, "these swift arrests cannot obscure the reality that too many families have had to bury a piece of their soul after yet another tragic shooting."

Biden called for increased efforts to reduce gun violence, including action by Congress.

Superintendent Thomas Ahart said school shootings have "become too common" and said that "real change to gun laws and access would go a long way to help us."

"Our staff and students," he said, "are forced to train for these incidents and the trauma associated with the repeated drills and incidents will remain with them for years to come. It's unfortunate that our state and our country have become a place where firearms are far too easily accessible."

A motive was not immediately known.

Des Moines Police Chief Dana Wingert went to the school after the shooting and expressed frustration at the violence.

"Unfortunately what happened here today was just another pointless tragedy in our community," Wingert told TV station WOI-TV. "People using firearms to settle their differences."

Police said it was the fourth homicide in Des Moines this year.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Security guard shot; kicked out shoplifters
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/safeway-security-guard-shot-outside-store-hours-after-kicking-out-shoplifters
GIST	<p>SEATTLE – A Safeway security guard was shot Monday night while outside the grocery store.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department said the security guard was working at the store in the 3800 block of Rainier Avenue South when he was shot in his legs.</p> <p>Police were called to the store around 11 p.m., which is where they found him before he was rushed to the hospital.</p>

	<p>Witnesses said the security guard had kicked several people out of the store earlier for shoplifting. One of those shoplifters reportedly punched and spit on the guard.</p> <p>Later, the shoplifter returned with a group, armed with a large stick and a gun. There was a fight between the guard, several others, and the group before he ended up shot. All suspects ran off after the shooting.</p> <p>The investigation is ongoing.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Man rams police barricade; escapes
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/north-sound-news/man-rams-police-barricade-escape-kenmore-officers/VJUB4KHWYJEQDODGJVFMRZFH5Y/
GIST	<p>KENMORE, Wash. — A man rammed his car into police cars in Kenmore to escape arrest, according to the Kenmore Police Department.</p> <p>Officers responded to a report of a man passed out behind the wheel of a car.</p> <p>They found drug paraphernalia on his lap and the man appeared to be impaired.</p> <p>Officers blocked the car with their patrol cars to prevent him from getting onto the road.</p> <p>Officers attempted to convince the man to get out of his car, but he rammed his car into the patrol cars and pushed one of them with his bumper until he had room to flee.</p> <p>The man was briefly pursued until the pursuit reached high speeds, when the chase was called off.</p> <p>The entire incident was caught on camera by a bystander.</p> <p>Officers are working to identify the man.</p> <p>No officers were injured.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Everett police warn of rise in gas theft
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/everett-police-warn-rise-gas-theft/VDNOS7YQJRAQRACZWT7ZYMLFBA/
GIST	<p>EVERETT, Wash. — Everett police say they're seeing an increase in gas theft as the price of gas continues to skyrocket.</p> <p>Instead of using rubber hoses to siphon fuel, police say some thieves are now using power tools to drill holes in gas tanks and steal fuel.</p> <p>Police recommend parking your vehicle in a garage or a well-lit, high-traveled area to help avoid being targeted by thieves.</p> <p>The average cost of damage to a gas tank is far higher than the value of any stolen gas.</p> <p>Statewide, the average for a gallon of regular unleaded gas jumped to \$4.55 a gallon Tuesday and officials say prices could go even higher.</p> <p>If you are a victim of gas theft, police say you should call 911 to report the damage to your vehicle, as well as the theft.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Man killed by police: mental health crisis
-----------------	---

SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-fatally-shot-by-seattle-police-had-rifle-was-moving-toward-officers-bodycam-footage-shows/
GIST	<p>BELLEVUE — Before he crashed his pickup into the Federal Office Building in downtown Seattle, before he fired a rifle seemingly at random, before he was fatally shot by Seattle police officers, William Michael Stephens scrawled in permanent marker all over his garage door about how there was a plot to kill him.</p> <p>Stephens, of Bellevue, was moving toward officers with a rifle when he was shot and killed, according to body-worn camera footage released by Seattle police Tuesday. But in recent weeks, Bellevue police and others who knew him had become alarmed by his spiraling mental health crisis, court records show.</p> <p>He was identified Tuesday as William Michael Stephens, 39, by the King County Medical Examiner’s Office, which determined he died from multiple gunshot wounds. According to a neighbor and court records, Stephens went by Mike.</p> <p>Stephens’ mental health appeared to deteriorate significantly in the last several months, to the extent that five days before he was killed, a Bellevue police officer filed a petition seeking an extreme risk protection order that would have barred Stephens from buying or possessing firearms, court records show.</p> <p>In recent weeks, Bellevue police and social workers, along with Stephens’ former attorney and psychiatrist, were gravely concerned by his deteriorating mental state, but were unable to stop him from driving to downtown Seattle on Saturday night and instigating an armed confrontation with police.</p> <p>According to the video released by Seattle police, when officers arrived after reports of gunfire, the man, dressed in coveralls, appears to be lying on his back, on the ground, with a rifle at his side. He is just outside the garage door at the Federal Office Building on First Avenue and Yesler. Multiple officers surround him, both at street level and from a staircase above. They repeatedly identify themselves as Seattle police and there are multiple calls to “drop your weapon” and “don’t do it.”</p> <p>“You want me to Taze him, I can get him from here?” one officer says.</p> <p>“No, you can’t get him from here,” another responds.</p> <p>“He’s trying to shoot himself in the head now,” one officer says.</p> <p>The man stands up, appears to pick up the rifle and begins moving toward officers. He is then hit by a barrage of shots.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department’s Force Investigations Team, which responds to all shootings by Seattle officers, is investigating the shooting and has not yet released additional information.</p> <p>A roll-up garage door leading into the federal building’s loading dock was damaged, along with a security camera and an emergency generator, Christi Chidester, a spokesperson for the U.S. General Services Administration, which manages the building, said in an email. There were also numerous bullet strikes around the loading dock and nearby area by the driveway on the southeast side of the property, she wrote. Chidester could not provide a damage estimate or timeline for when repairs would be completed.</p> <p>Stephens appeared to believe he was being threatened by the Brazilian mafia, his ex-wife and his ex-pastor, and that evidence of their conspiracy was contained in social media posts, according to the ERPO petition filed in King County Superior Court on Feb. 28.</p> <p>A court commissioner signed a temporary ERPO order that same day, but a police officer who attempted to serve Stephens with the court order on March 1, was apparently unable to locate him, the records show.</p> <p>Police had been called to Stephens’ Bellevue house at least twice in the preceding months, once in January and again Feb. 15.</p>

Both times he tried to explain to officers about a plot to kill him, according to police reports.

On Jan. 29, officers wrote, they tried to offer mental health services, but Stephens refused, insisting his case needed to be taken to the FBI. He never threatened others, they wrote, and did not meet the criteria for involuntary commitment.

On Feb. 15, Stephens again called police to his house. Again, he said he did not want to harm himself or others and declined offers of mental health care.

Police referred his case to [Bellevue Fire CARES](#), a city service where staff members, including social workers, seek to help people with needs that may not merit a 911 call or a fire or police response.

Staff at CARES, or Citizen Advocates for Referral and Education Services, called Stephens two days later but got a full voicemail. Three days after that, they visited his home but he wasn't there.

Two days before Bellevue police asked for the protection order, Stephens' former psychiatrist, in a witness statement, wrote that he believed Stephens' behavior was "of grave concern."

His concerns, the psychiatrist wrote, were for both Stephens and for his ex-wife.

"Mr. Stephens is suffering a very serious Delusion and rapid mental health decompensation and deterioration," the psychiatrist wrote. "I have treated individuals over the course of 44 years with behaviors such as this which may have the potential to manifest in violence. I believe that Mr. Stephen's condition is very dangerous."

At his five-bedroom home on a quiet Bellevue cul-de-sac, Stephens scrawled words and sentences in black and blue permanent marker across the garage and front door. It's unclear whether Stephens had a specific mental health diagnosis, but the words and phrases suggest the person who wrote them was struggling with paranoia.

"I need protective custody," one says.

"3 Red Lights = compromised Home."

"Flash one Headlight for signaling."

"Bellevue Police scared of truth only believe mafia."

Several of the messages appear to threaten Stephens' ex-wife. Stephens was arrested for fourth-degree assault domestic violence in 2020.

The ERPO petition for the protection order says Bellevue police believed Stephens "poses a significant danger in the near future" of injuring himself or others if he has a firearm. Stephens has had recent contacts with police, in the last month, the order says, and "appears to be in a declining mental state."

It says he had recently obtained a concealed pistol license and tried to purchase a gun at Wade's Gun Shop in Bellevue earlier in February.

Wade's declined to sell him a gun, the petition says, "after he expressed concerns about a mafia plot to kill him."

The petition notes concerns that Stephens might have been in the process of trying to buy a gun from another dealer.

	<p>Both Stephens' former psychiatrist and his attorney believed he was "delusional," according to statements included in the petition. The attorney said he was trying to convince Stephens to check himself into a mental health facility, the document says.</p> <p>One of Stephens' neighbors, who asked not to be named to protect his privacy, said he noticed a change in his friend about four months ago when he said Stephens began dating a woman online who lives in Brazil.</p> <p>Stephens began to believe he was in danger, the neighbor said. He closed down his landscaping business, sold most of his possessions and began sleeping in the attic and the crawl space, the neighbor said. His Facebook page is peppered with incoherent posts about a cult, murder plots and the mafia.</p> <p>"Really quickly he became super paranoid," the neighbor said. "He kept asking people what to do, 'who do I go to, there's watchers all over the place.' "</p> <p>The neighbor had been letting Stephens sleep in his camping trailer, in his driveway. Early Saturday evening, the neighbor said, Stephens asked if he could sleep in the neighbor's garage.</p> <p>"When I turned him down, he went out and jumped in his truck and took off, about 6:30," the neighbor said.</p> <p>The first 911 calls from downtown Seattle Saturday night came in about 90 minutes later.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Missouri: officer, suspect killed in shootout
SOURCE	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/joplin-missouri-police-shooting-1-officer-and-suspect-killed/
GIST	<p>One police officer was killed along with a suspect in a shooting in Joplin, Missouri, on Tuesday, police said. Two other officers were wounded and hospitalized.</p> <p>According to the Joplin Police Department, officers were called to the scene of a "disturbance" around 1:30 p.m. local time. As they attempted to take the suspect into custody, the suspect shot two officers, stole a police car and fled the scene. The suspect crashed the car and kept fleeing on foot, the department said.</p> <p>"Officers once again located the suspect, and he fired shots at officers, injuring one," Joplin police said. "An officer returned fire and struck the suspect."</p> <p>One officer is in critical condition and the other is in serious but stable condition, police said.</p> <p>Police did not identify the suspect or any of the officers who were shot. A press conference is planned for 9:00 a.m. CT on Wednesday.</p>
Return to Top	

HEADLINE	03/08 Ex-Proud Boys leader indicted; Jan 6 role
SOURCE	https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/pr/leader-proud-boys-indicted-federal-court-conspiracy-and-other-offenses-related-us-capitol
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON – Henry "Enrique" Tarrío, the former national chairman of the Proud Boys, was arrested today following his indictment on conspiracy and other charges related to the breach of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, which disrupted a joint session of the U.S. Congress that was in the process of ascertaining and counting the electoral votes related to the presidential election.</p> <p>Tarrío, 38, of Miami, Florida, was arrested in Miami and is to make his initial appearance today in the Southern District of Florida. He was named in a superseding indictment returned Monday in the District of Columbia that also includes five previously charged defendants.</p> <p>Others named in the superseding indictment include Ethan Nordean, 31, of Auburn, Washington; Joseph Biggs, 38, of Ormond Beach, Florida; Zachary Rehl, 36, of Philadelphia; Charles Donohoe, 34, of</p>

Kernersville, North Carolina; and Dominic Pezzola, 44, of Rochester, New York. All previously were detained. They earlier pleaded not guilty to charges.

According to court documents, the Proud Boys describes itself as a “pro-Western fraternal organization for men who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world, aka Western Chauvinists.” Through at least Jan. 6, 2021, Tarrío was the national chairman of the organization. In mid-December, Tarrío created a special chapter of the Proud Boys known as the “Ministry of Self Defense.”

As alleged in the indictment, from in or around December 2020, Tarrío and his co-defendants, all of whom were leaders or members of the Ministry of Self Defense, conspired to corruptly obstruct, influence, and impede an official proceeding, the certification of the Electoral College vote. On Jan. 6, the defendants directed, mobilized, and led members of the crowd onto the Capitol grounds and into the Capitol, leading to dismantling of metal barricades, destruction of property, and assaults on law enforcement.

Although Tarrío is not accused of physically taking part in the breach of the Capitol, the indictment alleges that he led the advance planning and remained in contact with other members of the Proud Boys during their breach of the Capitol. Tarrío was arrested on Jan. 4, 2021, on a warrant charging him in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia with destruction of property in the Dec. 12, 2020, burning of a Black Lives Matter banner. He was released at approximately 5 p.m. on Jan. 5, 2021. As a condition of his release, he was ordered by the Court to stay out of Washington.

The indictment alleges that Tarrío nonetheless continued to direct and encourage the Proud Boys prior to and during the events of Jan. 6, 2021, and that he claimed credit for what had happened on social media and in an encrypted chat room during and after the attack.

Tarrío was indicted on one count of each conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding and obstruction of an official proceeding, as well as two counts each of assaulting, resisting, or impeding certain officers and destruction of government property.

[Return to Top](#)

HEADLINE	03/08 Kuwait: acquittals on corruption charges
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/kuwaits-premier-officials-acquitted-corruption-case-83321970
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates -- A Kuwaiti court on Tuesday acquitted two former ministers and their co-defendants of the corruption charges they faced in an explosive case that tarnished the government and was widely seen as a test of accountability.</p> <p>The charges against Kuwait's former Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber al-Mubarak Al Sabah and his ally, former Interior Minister Sheikh Khalid al-Jarrah Al Sabah, along with other officials, concerned the embezzlement of \$790 million that had gone missing from a military aid fund years ago.</p> <p>The judge had placed the case under a gag order and the evidence presented in trial remains unknown to the public. Still, the past year of twists and turns in what became known as the “army fund case” garnered local headlines and transfixed much of the country, raising hopes of a reckoning in the Gulf Arab state about endemic government corruption that long has hurt public trust.</p> <p>In the fall of 2019, Kuwait’s former defense minister pressed for an investigation into the missing millions, triggering the downfall of the government when ministers refused to stand for questioning in parliament. Other scandals entrapping Kuwaiti officials that later came to light have further damaged the country's reputation, including a scheme to loot billions of dollars from a Malaysian sovereign wealth fund.</p> <p>In an unprecedented move last year, Kuwait's court ordered the two former ministers and royal family members, Sheikh Jaber and Sheikh Khalid, detained pending trial.</p> <p>But the ministerial court on Tuesday ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove its case against the officials, clearing them of all charges. The defendants' legal team celebrated the acquittal.</p>

	<p>Many Kuwaitis saw the decision as an unsurprising yet disappointing example of their country's faltering graft prosecutions. Activists on social media said the acquittal made a mockery of the government's highly publicized push to root out corruption.</p> <p>"We don't know where the money that was stolen in the army fund went, and many other billions missing with it," tweeted outspoken Kuwaiti opposition figure Bader al-Dahoum. "But I am certain that the corrupt and their supporters will be punished in this world and the hereafter."</p> <p>Lawmakers in Kuwait's rowdy National Assembly vowed to request a special parliamentary session next week to revive a probe into the missing military funds.</p>
	Return to Top

HEADLINE	03/08 Jury finds Jan 6 rioter guilty on all charges
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/capitol-rioter-guy-reffitt-found-guilty-counts/story?id=83322979
GIST	<p>A Texas man who is the first to stand trial in the prosecution of those who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, was found guilty Tuesday on all charges, including obstruction of an official proceeding, for his role in disrupting the certification of 2020 presidential election.</p> <p>Guy Reffitt was also found guilty of making threats to obstruct justice, transporting a firearm, and bringing that firearm to a restricted area he refused to leave.</p> <p>The jury returned the verdict after less than four hours of deliberation.</p> <p>Reffitt's case, which was a major test for the Justice Department in its sprawling effort to hold accountable those who participated in the riot, was bolstered by in-person testimony from multiple witnesses including Reffitt's own son, and photo and video evidence from the day that rioters attacked the Capitol.</p> <p>Reffitt is among the more than 750 people who have been charged in the Jan. 6 attack, and the jury's verdict could have an impact on hundreds of other defendants who have yet to enter into plea deals with the government. More than 200 people have already pleaded guilty to a variety of misdemeanors and felony charges, with some being sentenced to years in federal prison.</p> <p>The government sought to cast Reffitt, a member of the Texas Three Percenters militia group, as a ringleader of one of the first waves of the mob that breached the Capitol from its west side. Video played by prosecutors during the trial showed Reffitt climbing a stone banister near where scaffolding had been put up in advance of President Joe Biden's inauguration, and him confronting U.S. Capitol Police officers who warned him to back down before they fired less-than-lethal ammunition and pepper spray to stop his advance.</p> <p>In videos presented by the government, Reffitt is seen gesturing to the crowd behind him in what appears to be an attempt to get them to move up the stairs toward multiple entryways that lead into the building.</p> <p>At one point, the prosecution played out first-person footage that Reffitt recorded with a Kodak 360-degree camera mounted on his helmet while in the crowd at the "Save America" rally prior to the attack.</p> <p>"We're taking the Capitol before the day is out," Reffitt says in the video while in the crowd at the rally. "Everybody is in the same harmony on that ... dragging 'em out kicking and f***ing screaming."</p> <p>"I didn't come here to play games ... I just want to see Pelosi's head hit every f***ing stair on the way out," he says later. "I think we have the numbers to make it happen ... without firing a single shot."</p> <p>The government's case also relied in part on two key witnesses: former Texas Three Percenters Rocky Hardie, who testified against Reffitt in exchange for immunity to cooperate, and Reffitt's own son Jackson, who submitted an online tip to the FBI first alerting them to his father's plans.</p>

Jackson said that his father, growing concerned about inquiries from the FBI, had warned Jackson and his sister not to be a "traitor" and that "traitors get shot."

In a surprise move on the final day of witness testimony, the government scrapped earlier plans to call Reffitt's daughter Peyton to the stand, where she was expected to testify to her father's alleged threats.

The defense did not call any witnesses, and Reffitt himself declined to testify.

Reffitt's attorney William Welch sought to cast doubt on Jackson's and Hardie's testimony, underscoring Jackson's numerous media appearances and the success of his GoFundMe page, which has raised more than \$150,000.

U.S. Capitol Police Sgt. Adam DesCamp testified that he encountered Reffitt on Jan. 6 before he and other officers were assaulted by the mob. He described shooting Reffitt with plastic projectiles after Reffitt had already been hit with pepper balls, but said that neither ammunition deterred him. It was the first time they had deployed their less-than-lethal weapons systems, DesCamp said. He described a "long line of people" behind Reffitt as he approached the west side entrance.

"Did you feel outnumbered?" prosecutor Risa Berkower asked.

"Absolutely," replied DesCamp, who said Reffitt had made threatening remarks to DesCamp's partner, Officer Shauni Kerkoff, and other officers.

DesCamp said the crowd seemed to be "taking cues" from Reffitt as they shouted, "Don't be a traitor! Can't stop us all!"

"They were not direct threats, I believe they were implied," DesCamp said.

Reffitt is one of several Jan. 6 rioters accused of possessing a firearm while on Capitol grounds, and prosecutors said he traveled from his home in Texas to Washington with an AR-15 rifle and a Smith and Wesson .40 caliber pistol -- though he is only alleged to have carried the pistol during the riot itself. As evidence, the government provided an image of Reffitt's exposed waistband where a pistol holster and silver object is visible.

During his closing remarks, Welch conceded that his client had been in a restricted area and told the jury they should find him guilty of such an offense. But he disputed every other charge brought by the government, including whether his client carried his pistol with him at the time of the attack.

Prosecutors also played a recording Reffitt allegedly made of a Zoom meeting he participated in with other members of the Three Percenter militia group following the riot.

In it, Reffitt is heard talking about injuries he said he suffered getting shot by "clay bullets," and being "bear sprayed" by police outside of the Capitol.

"Baby, you're gonna need a bigger gun than that," Reffitt is heard bragging in the Zoom recording, recounting what he claimed he said to the female USCP officer who was shooting him with projectiles as he advanced toward her up the Capitol steps.

"They're lucky we didn't shoot 'em ... I mean, they really need to be grateful," Reffitt said, speaking about lawmakers in the Capitol that day.

Reffitt's wife Nicole decried the guilty verdict and urged other Jan. 6 defendants to remain defiant.

"Do not take a plea," said Nicole Reffitt, who indicted that her husband would appeal his verdict. "They want us to take a plea. The reason we have all guilty verdicts is they are making a point out of Guy and that is to intimidate the other members of the One-Sixers. And we will all fight together."

Return to Top	<p>She thanked the jury and court staff, but had strong words for prosecutors.</p> <p>"It just really opened my eyes up to the overreach of the DOJ and the affect that it will have on the American people in the long run. As long as you allow this to continue, you are all in danger," she said. "If you're going to be convicted on your first Amendment rights, all Americans should be wary. This fight has just begun."</p> <p>She said last month that the trail had thrown her family into turmoil.</p> <p>"It has been so difficult," she told ABC News. "The void that's been left by Jackson and Guy, the girls and I have a very hard time."</p> <p>"There were clearly signs he was getting involved with a lot of different people and a lot of bad people," Jackson Reffitt told ABC News about his father.</p> <p>"Hearing my father was there -- it was absolutely disgusting," he said. "And pretty much demoralizing. And I really lost all respect for him in that moment."</p> <p>Reffitt spoke to ABC News from jail in December, saying, "This has been disastrous for me and my family, especially for my girls, my son -- actually, all of my family."</p> <p>"I never expected anything like this to happen," he said.</p>
-------------------------------	---

Information From Online Communities and Unclassified Sources/InFOCUS is a situational awareness report published daily by the Washington State Fusion Center.

If you no longer wish to receive this report, please submit an email to intake@wsfc.wa.gov and enter UNSUBSCRIBE InFOCUS in the Subject line.

DISCLAIMER - the articles highlighted within InFOCUS is for informational purposes only and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Washington State Fusion Center, the City of Seattle, the Seattle Police Department or the Washington State Patrol and have been included only for ease of reference and academic purposes.

FAIR USE Notice All rights to these copyrighted items are reserved. Articles and graphics have been placed within for educational and discussion purposes only, in compliance with 'Fair Use' criteria established in Section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976. The principle of 'Fair Use' was established as law by Section 107 of The Copyright Act of 1976. 'Fair Use' legally eliminates the need to obtain permission or pay royalties for the use of previously copyrighted materials if the purposes of display include 'criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching, scholarship, and research.' Section 107 establishes four criteria for determining whether the use of a work in any particular case qualifies as a 'fair use'. A work used does not necessarily have to satisfy all four criteria to qualify as an instance of 'fair use'. Rather, 'fair use' is determined by the overall extent to which the cited work does or does not substantially satisfy the criteria in their totality. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes of your own that go beyond 'fair use,' you must obtain permission from the copyright owner. For more information go to: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>>

THIS DOCUMENT MAY CONTAIN COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL. COPYING AND DISSEMINATION IS PROHIBITED WITHOUT PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS.

Source: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/17/107.shtml>

[Return to Top](#)